

Sample Examination I

Section I

Questions 1-12. Refer to the following poem.

The Thief

- Thou robst my days of business and delights,
Of sleep thou robst my nights;
Ah, lovely thief, what wilt thou do?
What, rob me of heaven too?
- (5) Thou even my prayers dost steal from me;
And I with wild idolatry
Begin, to God, and end them all to thee.
- Is it a sin to love, that it should thus
Like an ill conscience torture us?
- (10) Whate'er I do, where'er I go
(None guiltless e'er was haunted so),
Still, still methinks thy face I view,
And still thy shape does me pursue,
As if, not you me, but I had murdered you.
- (15) From books I strive some remedy to take,
But thy name all the letters make;
Whate'er 'tis writ, I find that there,
Like points and commas everywhere.
Me blest for this let no man hold;
- (20) For I, as Midas did of old,
Perish by turning everything to gold.
- What do I seek, alas, or why do I
Attempt in vain from thee to fly?
For, making thee my deity,
- (25) I gave thee then ubiquity.
My pains resemble hell in this:
The divine presence there too is,
But to torment men, not to give them bliss.

—Abraham Cowley

1. The "thief" in the poem is the speaker's
 - (A) death
 - (B) age
 - (C) conscience
 - (D) beloved
 - (E) anxiety
2. According to the speaker, the "thief" in the poem does all of the following EXCEPT
 - (A) disrupt his concentration
 - (B) deprive him of rest
 - (C) jeopardize his salvation
 - (D) plague his conscience
 - (E) make him ponder suicide

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3. The primary dilemma confronting the speaker is his
- (A) considerable loss of income
 - (B) deleterious attraction to his beloved
 - (C) precipitous decline in health
 - (D) easy distraction from his studies
 - (E) misdirected faith
4. The speaker questions all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) the thief's designs on his soul
 - (B) the thief's mental cruelty
 - (C) his own level of culpability
 - (D) his attempts to find a solution in books
 - (E) the wisdom of his attempted flight
5. In the second stanza, the speaker emphasizes the extent of his torment through all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) simile
 - (B) repetition
 - (C) parenthetical comment
 - (D) irony
 - (E) metonymy
6. Lines 10-14 and 15-18 are primarily intended to bring out what aspect of the thief's nature?
- (A) her omnipresence
 - (B) her stealth
 - (C) her ruthlessness
 - (D) her illiteracy
 - (E) her desperation
7. The speaker's allusion to Midas (lines 20-21) emphasizes his own
- (A) material obsession
 - (B) intolerable hubris
 - (C) myopic foolhardiness
 - (D) advancing age
 - (E) unwarranted optimism
8. The word "ubiquity," as it is used in line 25, is BEST interpreted as
- (A) omnipotence
 - (B) adulation
 - (C) guerdon
 - (D) fealty
 - (E) satisfaction
9. In which of the following lines does the speaker offer the strongest admonition to the reader?
- (A) line 5
 - (B) lines 8-9
 - (C) line 19
 - (D) lines 22-23
 - (E) line 26
10. All of the following may be considered highly ironic EXCEPT
- (A) the initial direction of the speaker's prayers and the ultimate recipient of these appeals
 - (B) the speaker's obsession with his beloved and his sense of being pursued.
 - (C) the deification of the speaker's beloved and the hellish torment he claims to be experiencing
 - (D) the willing submission of the speaker to his beloved and the emotional dominion she exacts
 - (E) the title of the poem and the alleged actions of the speaker's beloved
11. Which of the following is NOT characteristic of the poet's style?
- (A) the use of a central conceit to develop the poem's theme
 - (B) irregular lines of predominantly iambic rhythm
 - (C) rhetorical questions that reflect the speaker's acute frustration
 - (D) highly imagistic descriptions of suffering
 - (E) religious diction

12. The tone of the poem is BEST classified as

- (A) nostalgic
- (B) exasperated
- (C) reverential
- (D) vindictive
- (E) defiant

Questions 13-24. Refer to the following passage.

- (5) August, the month that bears fruit, closed around the shop and Pete and Fritzie left for Minnesota to escape the heat. A month running, Fleur had won thirty dollars and only Pete's presence had kept Lily at bay. But Pete was gone now, and one payday, with the heat so bad no one could move but Fleur, the men sat and played and waited while she finished work. The cards sweat, limp in their fingers, the table was slick with grease, and even the walls were warm to the touch. The air was motionless.
- (10) Fleur was in the next room boiling heads. Her green dress, drenched, wrapped her like a transparent sheet. A skin of lakeweed. Black snarls of veining clung to her arms. Her braids were loose, half unraveled, tied behind her neck in a thick loop. She stood in steam, turning skulls through a vat with a wooden paddle. When scraps boiled to the surface, she bent with a round tin sieve and scooped them out. She'd filled two dishpans.
- (15) "Ain't that enough now?" called Lily. "We're waiting." The stump of a dog trembled in his lap, alive with rage. It never smelled me or noticed me above Fleur's smoky skin. The air was heavy in the corner, and pressed Russell and me down.
- (20) Fleur sat with the men.
- (25) "Now what do you say?" Lily asked the dog. It barked. That was the signal for the real game to start.
- (30) "Let's up the ante," said Lily, who had been stalking this night for weeks. He had a roll of money in his pocket. Fleur had five bills in her dress. Each man had saved his full pay that the bank officer had drawn from the Kozkas' account.
- (35) "Ante a dollar then," said Fleur, and pitched hers in. She lost, but they let her scrape along, a cent at a time. And then she won some. She played unevenly, as if chance were all she had. She reeled them in. The game went on. The dog was stiff now, poised on Lily's knees, a ball of vicious muscle with its yellow eyes slit in concentration. It gave advice, seemed to sniff the lay of Fleur's cards, twitched and nudged. Fleur was up, then down, saved by a scratch. Tor dealt seven cards, three down. The pot grew, round by round, until it held all the money. Nobody folded. Then

(55) it all rode on one last card and they went silent. Fleur picked hers up and drew a long breath. The heat lowered like a bell. Her card shook, but she stayed in.

(60) Lily smiled and took the dog's head tenderly between his palms.

"Say Fatso," he said, crooning the words. "You reckon that girl's bluffing?"

(65) The dog whined and Lily laughed. "Me too," he said. "Let's show." He tossed his bills and coins into the pot and then they turned their cards over.

Lily looked once, looked again, then he squeezed the dog like a fist of dough and slammed it on the table.

(70) Fleur threw out her arms and swept the money close, grinning that same wolf grin that she'd used on me, the grin that had them. She jammed the bills inside her dress, scooped the coins in waxed white paper that she tied with string.

(75) "Another round," said Lily, his voice choked with burrs. But Fleur opened her mouth and yawned, then walked out back to gather slops for the big hog that was waiting in the stockpen to be killed [. . .].

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13. The atmosphere in the room in which the card game is played is BEST described as
- (A) claustrophobic
 - (B) bellicose
 - (C) sultry
 - (D) frenzied
 - (E) lascivious
14. The events that take place are seemingly recounted by
- (A) Lily
 - (B) Fleur
 - (C) Tor
 - (D) an unidentified youth
 - (E) an omniscient narrator

15. The oppressive heat causes all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) the playing cards to become slick
 - (B) the air to become stagnant
 - (C) Fleur's dress to become diaphanous
 - (D) Lily to become impatient
 - (E) the other players to become irritable
16. The narrator implies which of the following about Fleur?
- (A) That she has cheated the other players.
 - (B) That she is reluctant to give them an opportunity to recoup their losses.
 - (C) That she has only experienced "beginner's luck."
 - (D) That she lures the men into a more risky wager.
 - (E) That she is being victimized by more experienced card sharks.
17. Lines such as "Let's up the ante" (line 34) and "Let's show" (line 63) are likely intended to convey Lily's
- (A) growing annoyance at Fleur's procrastination in the kitchen
 - (B) brash confidence that he will win back his losses
 - (C) reckless disregard for money
 - (D) desperate need to win a big hand
 - (E) impatient desire to bring the game to an end
18. The author mirrors Lily's changing fortunes and attitude through which of the following?
- I. The demeanor and body language of his dog.
 - II. The changing size of the pot on the table.
 - III. The facial expressions of the other card players.
- (A) I only
 - (B) III only
 - (C) I and II
 - (D) II and III
 - (E) I, II and III
19. The narrator likely describes Lily's voice as "choked with burrs" (line 76) to illustrate his
- (A) dehydration
 - (B) stuttering
 - (C) moroseness
 - (D) resignation
 - (E) ire
20. Which of the following pairs of words captures the impression of Fleur that the author MOST wishes to convey to the reader?
- (A) sensual and seductive
 - (B) dutiful and hardworking
 - (C) cunning and conniving
 - (D) outcast and exploited
 - (E) selfish and avaricious
21. The author draws an ironic and incongruous connection between the two principal characters in the episode through which of the following?
- (A) their attire
 - (B) their names
 - (C) their expressions
 - (D) their thought
 - (E) their dialogue
22. The passage subtly intimates which of the following?
- I. That after collecting her winnings Fleur will resign from her arduous job.
 - II. That the "real game" (line 33) does not necessarily involve card-playing.
 - III. That, as a result of her winning, Fleur may be a victim of violence.
- (A) I only
 - (B) III only
 - (C) I and II
 - (D) II and III
 - (E) I, II and III

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23. Which of the following demonstrates the literary device known as synaesthesia?

- (A) "the table was slick with grease [. . .]" (lines 10-11)
- (B) "A skin of lakeweed." (lines 15-16)
- (C) "The air was heavy in the corner, and pressed Russell and me down." (lines 28-29)
- (D) "a ball of vicious muscle, with its yellow eyes slit in concentration." (lines 46-48)
- (E) "The heat lowered like a bell." (line 56)

24. Which of the following is NOT characteristic of the author's style?

- (A) predominantly simple sentences whose brevity augments the episode's tension
- (B) the delineation of the dog as an integral character
- (C) descriptions of physical actions that reflect the antithetical emotions of Lily and Fleur
- (D) a modicum of dialogue
- (E) ubiquitous symbols of imminent death

Questions 25-39. Refer to the following poem.

After The Last Practice
(Grinnell, Iowa, November 1971)

Someone said, I remember the first hard crack,
Of shoulderpads on the sidelines before a game,
And the bruises that blossom on your arms
afterward.

Someone else remembered the faint, medicinal
smell

- (5) Seeping through the locker room on Saturday
mornings,
Getting your ankles taped while a halfback

Frets in the whirlpool about his hamstrings:
Steam on three mirrors, the nervous hiss
Of the first hot shower of the morning.

- (10) We talked about the tension mounting all day
Until it became the sound of spikes clattering
Across the locker room floor, the low banter

Of the last players pulling on their jerseys,
Our middle-linebacker humming to himself

- (15) And hammering a forearm against the lockers
While an assistant coach diagrammed a punt
Return for the umpteenth time on his clipboard
For two cornerbacks looking on in boredom...

Eventually, it always came down to a few words

- (20) From the head coach—quiet, focused, intense—
While a huge pit opened up in your stomach
And the steady buzz of a crowd in the distance
Turned into a minor roaring in your skull
As the team exploded onto the field.

- (25) The jitters never disappeared until the opening
Kickoff, the first contact, until a body
Hurtled down the field in a fury
And threw itself against your body
While everything else in the world faded

- (30) Before the crunching action of a play, unfolding...

I remember how, as we talked, the flat Midwestern
Fields stretched away into nowhere and nothing,
How the dark sky clouded over like a dome
Covering a chilly afternoon in late November

- (35) On the prairie, the scent of pine cones
And crisp leaves burning in the air,

The smoky glow of faces around a small fire.
Someone spoke of road trips and bridge games
In the back of a bus rolling across the plains,

- (40) Wooden fence posts ticking off the miles
And miles of empty cornfields and shortgrasses,
Windmills treading their arms, as if underwater,

The first orange lights rising on the horizon—
Jesus, someone said, I never thought it would end

- (45) Like this, without pads, without hitting anybody.
But then someone mentioned stepping out of bounds
And getting blindsided by a bone-wrenching tackle;
Someone else remembered writhing in a pile

Of players coming down on his twisted body.

- (50) Torn ligaments. Sprained wrist. A black coin
Blooming under your left eye on Sunday morning.
After all those years of drills and double practices,
Seasons of calisthenics, weightrooms, coaches
Barking orders—missed blocks, squirming fumbles—;

- (55) After all those summers of trying to perfect
A sideline pass and a button hook, a fly, a flag,
A deep post, a quick pass across the middle;

- After the broken patterns and failed double teams,
The July nights sprinting up the stadium stairs
(60) And the August days banging against each other's bodies,

The slow walks home alone in the dusky light—;
After all those injury-prone autumns, not
One of us could explain why he had done it.
What use now is the language of traps

- (65) And draws, of power sweeps and desperate on-side
Kicks, of screen passes, double reverses?

But still there was the memory of a sharp cut
Into the open and the pigskin spiraling
Into your hands from twenty yards away,

- (70) The ecstasy of breaking loose from a tackle
And romping for daylight, for the green
Promised land of the endzone.

Someone said, I remember running into the field
And seeing my girlfriend in the stands at midfield—

- (75) Everyone around her was chanting and shouting
And the adrenaline was coursing through my body;
I felt as if I would explode with happiness,
As if I would never falter, waver, or die...

Someone else recollected the endless, losing,

- (80) Thirteen-hour drive home after he had bruised
A collarbone on the last play of the game,
The whole bus encased in silence, like a glass
Jar, like the night itself, clarified. Afterward,
He recalled the wild joy of his first interception...

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- (85) The fire sputtered and smoldered, faded out,
And our voices trembled in the ghostly woodsmoke
Until it seemed as if we were partly warriors
And partly Boy Scouts ringed around the flame,
Holding our helmets in our arms and trying
- (90) To understand an old appetite for glory,

Our raging, innocent, violent, American
Boyhoods gone now, vanished forever
Like the victories and the hard losses.
It was late. A deep silence descended
(95) As twilight disintegrated in the night air
And the fire glowered down to embers and ashes,

To red bits of nothing. But no one moved. Oh,
We were burning, burning, burning, burning...
And then someone began singing in the darkness.

—Edward Hirsch

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25. The main focus of the poem involves the
- (A) enduring legacy of athletic triumph
 - (B) fleeting nature of youth and glory
 - (C) inordinate cruelty of coaches
 - (D) physical betrayal of the body
 - (E) idyllic nature of small-town America
26. The tone of the poem is BEST labeled
- (A) melancholy
 - (B) quizzical
 - (C) vindictive
 - (D) reflective
 - (E) nostalgic
27. All of the following help to reinforce the sensory nature of the first two stanzas EXCEPT
- (A) "first hard crack / Of shoulderpads on the sidelines [. . .]" (lines 1-2)
 - (B) "bruises that blossom on your arms [. . .]" (line 3)
 - (C) "faint, medicinal smell / Seeping through the locker room on Saturday mornings [. . .]" (lines 4-5)
 - (D) "the nervous hiss / Of the first hot shower [. . .]" (lines 8-9)
 - (E) "the tension mounting all day [. . .]" (line 10)
28. The most common feeling displayed by the players *before* the contest is
- (A) belligerence
 - (B) apprehension
 - (C) impatience
 - (D) pride
 - (E) tedium

29. The sixth and seventh stanzas of the poem (lines 31-42) do which of the following?
- I. Provide a measure of local color by introducing the reader to a specific geographical setting.
 - II. Imagistically reinforce the friends' enduring camaraderie.
 - III. Symbolically mirror the teammates' vanishing youth.
- (A) I only
 - (B) II only
 - (C) I and III
 - (D) II and III
 - (E) I, II and III
30. Lines 44-45—"Jesus, someone said, I never thought it would end / Like this, without pads, without hitting anybody"—are primarily intended to
- (A) intimate subtly that the players' adult lives have been anticlimactic
 - (B) bemoan the brevity of adolescence
 - (C) divorce one individual from his former teammates
 - (D) trigger the subsequent flashbacks of gridiron heroism
 - (E) deny the reality of a particularly depressing loss
31. The memories presented in lines 46-61
- (A) celebrate individual character and toughness
 - (B) acknowledge the temporal sacrifices demanded by sport
 - (C) confirm the virtues of hard work and self-discipline
 - (D) censure the dirty tactics of opponents
 - (E) mask the disappointing realities of their post-adolescent lives
32. The diction and imagery in stanzas twelve and thirteen (lines 67-78) are suggestive of all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) youth and freedom
 - (B) heroism and celebrity
 - (C) perfection and accomplishment
 - (D) transience and mortality
 - (E) jubilation and romance
33. The Boy Scout-warrior dichotomy, mentioned in lines 87-88, reinforces which of the following contrasts?
- (A) corruption and innocence
 - (B) youth and maturity
 - (C) fear and courage
 - (D) strength and weakness
 - (E) responsibility and freedom
34. The speaker's comment that they were all "burning, burning, etc" (line 98) may plausibly be interpreted as which of the following?
- I. Desiring to be young again.
 - II. Rapidly passing into insignificance.
 - III. Becoming irate over their lost youth.
- (A) I only
 - (B) III only
 - (C) I and II
 - (D) I and III
 - (E) I, II and III
35. Which of the following contributes LEAST to the contemplative mood of the last three stanzas?
- (A) the onomatopoeic nature of the word "sputtered" (line 85)
 - (B) the comparison "as if we were partly warriors / And partly Boy Scouts [. . .]" (lines 87-88)
 - (C) the short declarative sentences "It was late" (line 94) and "But no one moved" (line 97)
 - (D) the alliterative diction of "A deep silence descended / As twilight disintegrated [. . .]" (lines 94-95)
 - (E) the fire's "glower[ing] down to embers and ashes [. . .]" (line 96)

36. In the course of the poem, the poet uses simile to depict each of the following EXCEPT
- (A) the sky's manifestation of approaching winter
 - (B) the sluggish motion of the windmills
 - (C) the facial bruises that were the by-product of practice
 - (D) the oppressive quiet after a defeat
 - (E) the ephemeral nature of adolescent sport
37. When one considers the context in which it appears, which of the following is NOT intended to contribute to the transitory nature of the teammates' adolescent athletic experiences?
- (A) "The smoky glow of faces around a small fire." (line 37)
 - (B) "Jesus, someone said, I never thought it would end / Like this, without pads, without hitting anybody." (lines 44-45)
 - (C) "What use now is the language of traps / And draws, of power sweeps and desperate on-side / Kicks, of screen passes, double reverses?" (lines 64-66)
 - (D) "Holding our helmets in our arms and trying / To understand an old appetite for glory [. . .]" (lines 89-90)
 - (E) "Oh, / We were burning, burning, burning, burning [. . .]" (lines 97-98)
38. Which of the following mirrors the diminishing significance of the individuals and their exploits on the football field?
- I. The ambiguity and inconsistency of their recollections.
 - II. The poet's use of indefinite personal pronouns in lieu of names.
 - III. The symbol of the sputtering and smoldering fire.
- (A) I only
 - (B) II only
 - (C) I and II
 - (D) II and III
 - (E) I, II and III
39. All of the following are stylistic traits of the poem EXCEPT
- (A) a shifting narrative perspective
 - (B) the technical terminology of football
 - (C) a catalog of ritualistic pre-game preparation
 - (D) a contrast between youth and infirmity
 - (E) free verse couched in a structured stanzaic pattern

Questions 40-51. Refer to the following passage.

- For a man to write well there are required three necessities—to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and much exercise of his own style. In style, to consider what ought to be written, and after what manner, he must first think and excogitate his matter, then choose his words and examine the weight of either. Then take care, in placing and ranking both matter and words, that the composition be comely; and to do this with diligence and often. No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be labored and accurate; seek the best and be not glad of the forward conceits or first words that offer themselves to us, but judge of what we invent, and order what we approve. Repeat often what we have formerly written; which beside that it helps the consequence, and makes the juncture better, it quickens the heat of imagination, that often cools in the time of setting down, and gives it new strength, as if it grew lustier by the going back. As we see in the contention of leaping, they jump farthest that fetch their race largest; or, as in throwing a dart or javelin, we force back our arms to make our loose the stronger. Yet, if we have a fair gale of wind, I forbid not the steering out of our sail, so the favor of the gale deceive us not. For all that we invent doth please us in the conception of our birth, else we would never set it down. But the safest is to return to our judgment, and handle over again those things the easiness of which might make them justly suspected. So did the best writers in their beginnings; they imposed upon themselves care and industry; they did nothing rashly; they obtained first to write well, and then custom made it easy and a habit. By little and little their matter showed itself to them more plentifully; their words answered, their composition followed; and all, as in a well-ordered family, presented itself in the place. So that the sum of all is, ready writing makes not good writing, but good writing brings on ready writing. Yet, when we think we have got the faculty, it is even then good to resist it, as to give a horse a check sometimes with a bit, which doth not so much stop his course as stir his mettle. Again, whither a man's genius is best able to reach, thither it should more and more

- (55) contend, lift and dilate itself; as men of low stature raise themselves on their toes, and so oft-times get even, if not eminent. Besides, as it is fit for grown and able writers to stand of themselves, and work with their own strength, to trust and endeavor by their own faculties, so it is fit for the beginner and learner to study others and the best. For the mind and memory are more sharply exercised in comprehending another man's things than our own; and such as accustom themselves and are familiar with the best authors shall ever and anon find somewhat of them in themselves, and in the expression of their minds, even when they feel it not, be able to utter something like theirs, which hath an authority above their own. Nay, sometimes it is the reward of a man's study, the praise of quoting another man fitly; and though a man be more prone and able for one kind of writing than another, yet he must exercise all. For as in an instrument, so in style, there must be harmony and consent of parts.

40. The author's tone is BEST characterized as

- (A) highbrow
- (B) reflective
- (C) disparaging
- (D) admonitory
- (E) didactic

41. In advancing his argument the author makes use of all of the following EXCEPT

- (A) subtle sarcasm that reveals his disfavor of novice writers
- (B) mild imperatives that offer counsel to his intended audience, writers
- (C) analogous situations that buttress his point
- (D) a paradox that underscores the relation between the disciplined writer and the quality of what he produces
- (E) a collective "we" that hints at his own struggles with mastering the craft of writing

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42. The allusions to jumping and javelin throwing in lines 23-27 are primarily intended to buttress the author's conviction about the importance of
- (A) pondering the choice of subject matter
 - (B) repeating what one has previously written to strengthen it
 - (C) practicing writing daily so as to improve one's craft
 - (D) studying the form of another writer to refine one's own
 - (E) trying something new and more challenging
43. Which of the following may safely be said about lines 28-30?
- I. They are an admonition against insufficiently thought out developments in the plot.
 - II. They seemingly contradict the author's earlier comment that "No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be labored and accurate [. . .]" (lines 12-13).
 - III. They reflect the author's concession that there may be moments when a writer must flow with his inspiration or rhythm.
- (A) I only
 - (B) II only
 - (C) I and III
 - (D) II and III
 - (E) I, II and III
44. The simile couched in lines 47-51 warns writers against becoming
- (A) hasty
 - (B) overconfident
 - (C) undisciplined
 - (D) indolent
 - (E) adamant
45. Lines 52-54, "Again, whither a man's genius is best able to reach, thither it should more and more contend [. . .]," suggest that when a writer is at the height of his creative powers he should
- (A) be content with what he has accomplished
 - (B) remember the common stock from which he has risen
 - (C) begin to compare himself to more accomplished literary greats
 - (D) be more daring in the scope and reach of his literary endeavors
 - (E) bask in his newly acquired popularity
46. The author suggests that all writers—particularly novice ones—should "accustom themselves" (line 65) to the best authors for which of the following reasons?
- I. To discover some part of themselves in a more established writer's voice or material.
 - II. To expose themselves to other styles and genres of writing.
 - III. To utilize these authors' works as exemplars they might imitate.
- (A) I only
 - (B) II only
 - (C) I and III
 - (D) II and III
 - (E) I, II and III
47. Which of the following does NOT paraphrase advice given by Jonson as to how best to effect good writing?
- (A) Determine both the subject of your writing and the best form in which to express it.
 - (B) Take care to find the most appropriate words even if it is an extremely deliberate process.
 - (C) Establish your own, unique style that has not been influenced by writers who have come before you.
 - (D) Reflect upon your initial inspirations to insure that they are as good as you initially considered them.
 - (E) Be humble about your accomplishments so you are not seduced by your own genius.

48. In the course of his essay, the author draws comparisons to all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) athletic competition
 - (B) government
 - (C) horseback riding
 - (D) sailing
 - (E) music
49. In light of the context in which each word is embedded, which of the following would be the LEAST suitable replacement for one of the archaisms listed below?
- (A) "ponder" for "excogitate" (line 7)
 - (B) "common" for "forward" (line 14)
 - (C) "release" for "loose" (line 27)
 - (D) "aspired" for "obtained" (line 39)
 - (E) "spontaneous" for "ready" (lines 45 and 47)
50. Ironically, a purist might find Jonson's opening sentence to be marred by which of the following?
- (A) faulty parallelism
 - (B) a misnomer
 - (C) a dangling participle
 - (D) comma splice
 - (E) misplaced modifiers
51. The passage ultimately makes what point about professional writers?
- (A) They are born, not made.
 - (B) They hone their craft by degrees.
 - (C) They regularly mimic the work of their peers.
 - (D) They remain insecure about their abilities.
 - (E) They give little thought to the relation between style and subject.

Section II

Question One

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Read the following poem carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, indicate how the poet uses images and symbols to link the predicament of the lost boy to the domestic situation of the speaker.

The Mystery of the Caves

I don't remember the name of the story,
but the hero, a boy, was lost,
wandering a labyrinth of caverns
filling stratum by stratum with water.

- (5) I was wondering what might happen:
would he float upward toward light?
Or would he somersault forever
in an underground black river?

- (10) I couldn't stop reading the book
because I had to know the answer,
because my mother was leaving again—
the lid of the trunk thrown open,

- (15) blouses torn from their hangers,
the crazy shouting among rooms.
The boy found it impossible to see
which passage led to safety.

- (20) One yellow finger of flame
wavered on his last match.
There was a blur of perfume,
my mother breaking miniature bottles,

then my father gripping her,
but too tightly, by both arms.
The boy wasn't able to breathe.
I think he wanted me to help,

- (25) but I was small, and it was late.
And my mother was sobbing now,
no longer cursing her life,
repeating my father's name

- (30) among bright islands of skirts
circling the rim of the bed.
I can't recall the whole story,
what happened at the end...

- (35) Sometimes I worry that the boy
is still searching below the earth
for a thin pencil of light,
that I can almost hear him

- (40) through great volumes of water,
through centuries of stone,
crying my name among blind fish,
wanting so much to come home.

—Michael Waters

From *Parthenopi: New and Selected Poems* (BOA Editions, 2001).
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Question Two

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Read the following passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, discuss how the literary elements of the passage reveal the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue. In your essay, you may wish to consider such things as diction, choice of detail, symbolism, and tone.

In the lonely room of his aunt's house Jude sat watching the cottage of the Widow Edlin as it disappeared behind the night shade. He knew that Sue was sitting within its walls equally lonely and disheartened; and again questioned his devotional model that all was for the best.

(5) He retired to rest early, but his sleep was fitful from the sense that Sue was so near at hand. At some time near two o'clock, when he was beginning to sleep more soundly, he was aroused by a shrill squeak that had been familiar enough to him when he lived regularly at Marygreen. It was the cry of a rabbit caught in a gin. As was the little creature's habit, it did not soon repeat its cry; and probably would not do so more than once or twice; but would remain bearing its torture to the morrow, when the trapper would come back and knock it on the head.

(10) He who in his childhood had saved the lives of the earthworms now began to picture the agonies of the rabbit from its lacerated leg. If it were a 'bad catch' by the hind-leg, the animal would tug during the ensuing six hours till the iron teeth of the trap had stripped the leg-bone of its flesh, when, should a weak-sprung instrument enable it to escape, it would die in the field from the mortification of the limb. If it were a 'good catch,' namely, by the fore-leg, the bone would be broken, and the limb nearly torn in two in attempts at an impossible escape.

(15) Almost half-an-hour passed, and the rabbit repeated its cry. Jude could rest no longer till he had put it out of his pain, so dressing himself quickly he descended, and by the light of the moon went across the green in the direction of the sound. He reached the hedge bordering the widow's garden, when he stood still. The faint click of the trap as dragged about by the writhing animal guided him now, and reaching the spot he struck the rabbit on the back of the neck with the side of his palm, and it stretched itself out dead.

He was turning away when he saw a woman looking out of the open casement at a window on the ground floor of the adjacent cottage. 'Jude!' said a voice timidly—Sue's voice. 'It is you—is it not?'

'Yes, dear!'

(25) 'I haven't been able to sleep at all, and then I heard the rabbit, and couldn't help thinking of what it suffered, till I felt I must come down and kill it! But I am so glad you got there first....They ought not to be allowed to set these steel traps, ought they!'

Jude had reached the window, which was quite a low one, so that she was visible down to her waist. She let go of the casement stay and put her hand upon his, her moonlit face regarding him wistfully.

(30) 'Did it keep you awake?' he said.

'No—I was awake.'

'How was that?'

(35) 'O, you know—now! I know you, with your religious doctrines, think that a married woman in the trouble of a kind like mine commits a mortal sin in making a man the confidant of it, as I did you. I wish I hadn't, now!' [. . .].

'I wish you were happy, whatever I may be!'

(40) 'I *can't* be! So few could enter into my feeling—they would say 'twas my fanciful fastidiousness, or something of that sort, and condemn me....It is none of the natural tragedies of love that's love's usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting!....Jude, before I married him I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me—there was no excuse. I was old enough, and I thought I was very experienced. So I rushed on...with all the cock-sureness of the fool that I was!...I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick....When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what *will* they say!' [. . .].

Question Three

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Oftentimes in literature a character gradually becomes estranged from society due to some aspect of his/her nature or convictions, an estrangement that may have damaging consequences either for the individual or for the society itself. Choose a novel or play which features a character who has become estranged from the society in which he/she exists. Then, in a carefully well-organized, indicate the impetus behind the estrangement and the damaging effects this alienation has upon the individual or the society around him/her. You may choose from the list below or use another novel or play of recognized literary merit.

The Catcher in the Rye

Medea

The Scarlet Letter

Jude the Obscure

The Stranger

The Elephant Man

On the Road

Stranger in a Strange Land

Wise Blood

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

The Awakening

Winesburg, Ohio

The Metamorphosis

The Power and the Glory

A Man For All Seasons

Invisible Man

The Hairy Ape

Oliver Twist

Hedda Gabler

Down These Mean Streets

Hamlet

Bartleby the Scrivener

Ethan Frome

Sample Examination One: Explications and Answers

Passage One: Abraham Cowley's "The Thief"

Abraham Cowley's "The Thief" explores a familiar poetic theme—that of a lover suffering the pangs of romantic love—one that is omnipresent in sonneteers from Thomas Wyatt to William Shakespeare. Here, however, the speaker does not bemoan an unrequited love that is figuratively represented by an elusive hind or a distant port, but laments the emotional distress engendered by a realized one.

Using the conceit of a thief, the speaker in the poem endeavors to convey the toll this relationship has exacted on him. In the opening stanza the beloved is seen as distracting the speaker from both business and pleasure during the day, and robbing him of sleep during the night. So powerful is the beloved's lure that the speaker confesses that the prayers he normally would direct to God have with a "wild idolatry" (line 6) been misdirected to his beloved. Aware of the price of such earthly obsession, the speaker helplessly inquires, "Ah, lovely thief, what wilt thou do? / What, rob me of heaven too?" (lines 3-4). This question is buttressed by the query that opens the second stanza, "Is it a sin to love, that it should thus / Like an ill conscience torture us?" (lines 8-9), the speaker again associating love with wrongdoing. In lines 10-14 the speaker depicts himself as a fugitive, a man whose mind is continually haunted by the face and shape of his beloved with such intensity it is as if he has committed a conscience-plaguing murder. In the third stanza the speaker endeavors to distract his mind with reading, but this too proves a fruitless endeavor since he finds that "[her] name all the letters make; / Whate'er 'tis writ, I find that there, / Like points and commas everywhere" (lines 16-18). So plagued is he by this 'happy state' that he likens himself to Midas, whose hasty and foolish wish to turn everything into gold caused him more grief than happiness.

In the fourth and final stanza, however, the speaker seems more resigned to his state. His rhetorical question, "What do I seek, alas, or why do I / Attempt in vain from thee to fly?" (lines 22-23), seems to acknowledge the futility of his lot, while his subsequent observation, "For, making thee my deity, / I gave thee then ubiquity" (lines 24-25), admits his awareness that he himself has engendered this problem. Those familiar with Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale" will recognize that, like the knight in the good Wife's story, the speaker has surrendered the mastery to his beloved, and if his "pains resemble hell" (line 26) they are a damnation brought upon him by himself. The poem's epigrammatic closure, "The divine presence there too is, / But to torment men, not to give them bliss" (lines 27-28), captures the cruel irony that all sublunary lovers know too well: that love hurts, sometimes more when you are in it than when you are out of it.

1. The “thief” in the poem is the speaker’s **(D) beloved**.

As is common in many early poems, the speaker is smitten by a woman. However, unlike many of the early sonnets in which the speaker is the victim of unrequited love, the speaker in this poem is tormented by an obsession with his beloved, one so acute that it torments him while he is awake or asleep. So strong is the speaker’s obsession for his beloved that he admits to making her his “deity” (line 24) and, in so doing, giving her “ubiquity” (line 25), or complete control over him. Choice D reflects this best.

2. According to the speaker, the “thief” in the poem does all of the following EXCEPT **(E) make him ponder suicide**.

The speaker states “Thou robst my days of business and delights / Of sleep thou robst my nights” (lines 1-2), suggesting that he can neither focus on his work nor get any rest. This confirms choices A and B. He also states, “Ah, lovely thief, what wilt thou do? / What, rob me of heaven too? / Thou even my prayers dost steal from me; / And I with wild idolatry / Begin, to God, and end them all to thee” (lines 3-7). This suggests that even when he tries to pray his distracted thoughts turn to his beloved. Moreover, he asks in lines 8-9, “Is it a sin to love, that it should thus / Like an ill conscience torture us?,” suggesting that though he is “guiltless” he feels as if he has done something wrong. This information confirms choices C and D. Choice E is nowhere apparent in the passage.

3. The primary dilemma confronting the speaker is his **(B) deleterious attraction to his beloved**.

As has been suggested in the explanation of question #1, the speaker’s obsession with his beloved has had a deleterious effect upon his work, his play, his sleep, even his chance at salvation. Even when he reads, he cannot take his mind off this woman, saying that “[her] name all the letters make” (line 16). So tormented is he that he states “My pains resemble hell in this” (line 26).

4. The speaker questions all of the following EXCEPT **(C) his own level of culpability**.

Lines 3-4, “Ah, lovely thief, what wilt thou do? / What, rob me of heaven too?,” confirm A, while line 9, “Like an ill conscience torture us,” validates B. Line 15, “From books I strive some remedy to take,” supports D, while lines 22-23, “why do I / Attempt in vain from thee to fly?,” prove E. The speaker, however, clearly states in line 11, “(None guiltless e’er was haunted so),” making C the exception.

5. In the second stanza, the speaker emphasizes the extent of his torment through all of the following EXCEPT **(E) metonymy**.

“Like an ill conscience” in line 9 is a simile, while “Still, still” (line 12) exemplifies repetition. “(None guiltless e’er was haunted so)” in line 11 is a parenthetical comment, while lines 13-14, “And still thy shape does me pursue, / As if, not you me, but I had murdered you,” exemplify irony. This validates choices A, B, C and D. Choice E, metonymy, is not evident in the second stanza.

6. Lines 10-14 and 15-18 are primarily intended to bring out what aspect of the thief's nature? **(A) her omnipresence.**

Lines 10-14 suggest that the speaker cannot get his beloved's face out of his mind, while lines 15-18 imply that even when he tries to lose himself in reading, he sees her name in the letters written on each page. Choice A reflects this idea best.

7. The speaker's allusion to Midas (lines 20-21) emphasizes his own **(C) myopic foolhardiness.**

The speaker's allusion to Midas, whose wish that everything he touched be turned to gold proved rash and foolhardy when he saw his food and daughter so transformed, suggests that he is painfully conscious of his own stupidity in permitting his obsession with his beloved to transform all the other aspects of his life into unhappiness. Choice C most accurately reflects this.

8. The word "ubiquity," as it is used in line 25, is BEST interpreted as **(A) omnipotence.**

The speaker admits that by worshipping his beloved as if she were a deity, he has made her into an all-powerful presence, one that holds sway over all the other aspects of his existence. This is best represented by choice A.

9. In which of the following lines does the speaker offer the strongest admonition to the reader? **(C) line 19.**

In line 19, "Me blest for this let no man hold," the speaker sends out a clear message to all other men that the state he is in is hardly a pleasurable one, but rather his own private hell.

10. All of the following may be considered highly ironic EXCEPT **(E) the title of the poem and the alleged actions of the speaker's beloved.**

The speaker intends to pray to God but ends up making his beloved a deity. The speaker cannot take his mind off his beloved, yet he sees her shape as pursuing him. He deifies his love, yet he says his "pains resemble hell" (line 26). He willingly grants her "ubiquity," yet he suggests she torments him. This information validates choices A, B, C and D as ironies. The title of the poem and the poem's central conceit are metaphorical but not ironic.

11. Which of the following is NOT characteristic of the poet's style? **(D) highly imagistic descriptions of suffering.**

The central conceit of love's being a thief, the seven-line stanzas of irregular length but of a definite iambic meter, rhetorical questions such as "What, rob me of heaven too?" (line 4) and "What do I seek, alas, or why do I / Attempt in vain to fly?" (lines 22-23), and words such as "heaven" (line 4), "prayers" (line 5), "conscience" (line 9) and "deity" (line 24) are all characteristic of the author's style, confirming the presence of A, B, C, and E and leaving choice D as the exception.

12. The tone of the poem is BEST classified as **(B) exasperated**.

The speaker seems about ready to give up, particularly in expressions such as "What do I seek, alas, or why do I / Attempt in vain to fly?" (lines 22-23). He tries to remedy his situation through work, sleep, prayer and reading, but can find no escape from his romantic obsession. Choice B expresses this best.

Passage Two: From Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*

The second selection in Sample Examination Two, an excerpt from noted Native American author Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks*, focuses about a card game that ominously escalates into something more dangerous. Set in an Ontario butcher shop described by the narrator as "part killing shed, part store," the passage opens with a young, attractive but equally clever Chippewa woman named Fleur's having won thirty dollars over several weeks of playing cards with the shop workers. Fleur's success at a man's game irritates the other players, in particular Lily who, the narrator indicates, had been kept at bay until now by Pete, the owner of the shop. However, in the sweltering heat of an August night, with her aegis Pete's having left for the cooler ambience of Minnesota, Fleur finds herself in a more hostile and more vulnerable position.

The atmosphere established in the opening paragraph is a stifling one: the air motionless, the heat and humidity so intense that no one at the card table can move and cards and walls are damp to the touch. Fleur, who is still at work boiling hogheads in the back room, contributes heat of a different kind, her "green dress, drenched, wrapped [around] her like a transparent sheet" (lines 14-15). Impatient to recoup some of his lost money, Lily bellows "'Ain't that enough now'" (line 24) to Fleur, who is busy in the back, collecting scraps loosened from the hogheads by the boiling water that she turns with a paddle. When she joins the game, her skin smoking, the room is filled with palpable tension, including the growling animus of the small dog that Lily cradles in his lap.

When the game commences, Lily, with "a roll of money in his pocket" (line 36), immediately raises the ante. The phrase, he "had been stalking this night for weeks" (line 35), reflects both his eagerness to recover his losses and the lust for Fleur that had heretofore been checked by Pete. As the game develops, Fleur is said to play "unevenly" (line 43), winning enough to stay in the game, losing enough to entice them to swell the pot. Erdrich's terse, declarative sentences and her description of the body language of Lily's dog magnify the tension:

The game went on. The dog was stiff now, poised on Lily's knees, a ball of vicious muscle with its yellow eyes slit in concentration. It gave advice, seemed to sniff the lay of Fleur's cards, twitched and nudged. Fleur was up, then down, saved by a scratch. Tor dealt seven cards, three down. The pot grew, round by round, until it held all the money. Nobody folded. Then it all rode on one last card and they went silent [. . .] (lines 45-55).

As Fleur picks up her final hand, the author uses synaesthesia—the merging of two sensory images (in this case touch and sound) in "The heat lowered like a bell" (line 56)—to capture the deafening nature of the room's silence. Though this is momentarily relieved by Lily's smirking rhetorical query to his dog, "'You reckon that girl's bluffing?'" (line 61), and his overconfident reply, "'Me too'" (line 63), Lily's pushing of all his remaining bills and coins into the center of the table once more ratchets up the tension.

When the turned cards favor Fleur, the antithetical fortunes of the two main characters are readily apparent. As Erdrich describes,

Lily looked once, looked again, then he squeezed the dog like a fist of dough and slammed it on the table.

Fleur threw out her arms and swept the money close, grinning that same wolf grin that she'd used on me, the grin that had them. She jammed the bills inside her dress, scooped the coins in waxed white paper that she tied with string (lines 66-74).

Verbs such as "squeezed" (line 67) and "slammed" (line 68) convey the frustration of Lily's defeat, while phrases such as "swept the money close" (lines 69-70) and "jammed the bills inside her dress" (line 72) capture the elation of Fleur's triumph. Moreover, Fleur's "wolf grin" (lines 70-71) reinforces the implication that she has been conning them all along. Lily's burr-choked request for another round, a request almost impeded by the extremity of his irritation, is ignored by Fleur, who complacently yawns and returns to her work in the back room.

Though the cut used here does not include the vindictive action that follows, the selection from Erdrich's novel provides an interesting descriptive and narrative challenge. This and the irony of Fleur's triumph, her "turning the tables" on the workers who see her as a gullible mark, provide an interesting prose challenge for the Advanced Placement English student.

13. The atmosphere in the room in which the card game is played is BEST described as **(C) sultry**.

Lines 7-18 state that “the heat [was] so bad no one could move [. . .],” while lines 9-12 describe how “The cards sweat, limp in their fingers, the table was slick with grease, and even the walls were warm to the touch. The air was motionless.” Choice C reflects this best.

14. The events that take place are seemingly recounted by **(D) an unidentified youth**.

Though the novel obviously clarifies who is telling the story, the only clues to the nature of the narrator occur in lines 25-29 in which the narrator states “The stump of a dog trembled in his lap, alive with rage. It never smelled me or noticed me above Fleur’s smoky skin. The air was heavy in the corner, and pressed Russell and me down.” This suggests that the narrator and his/her companion Russell are small enough to conceal or position themselves unobtrusively in a corner. This and the clear admiration the narrator shows for Fleur’s cleverness suggests he/she is of a younger age.

15. The oppressive heat causes all of the following EXCEPT **(E) the other players to become irritable**.

Lines 9-10 recount how the cards “sweat,” while line 12 indicates how the air was “motionless.” Lines 14-16 describe Fleur’s dress as “drenched, wrapp[ing] her like a transparent sheet. A skin of lakeweed,” while Lily is observed saying in lines 24-25, “‘Ain’t that enough now?’ ‘We’re waiting.’” This information validates choices A, B, C and D. Nowhere do the other players display any impatience, making E the exception.

16. The narrator implies which of the following about Fleur? **(D) That she lures the men into a more risky wager.**

This is readily apparent in lines 40-45, “‘Ante a dollar then,’ said Fleur, and pitched hers in. She lost, but they let her scrape along, a cent at a time. And then she won some. She played unevenly, as if chance were all she had. She reeled them in.”

17. Lines such as “Let’s up the ante” (line 34) and “Let’s show” (line 63) are likely intended to convey Lily’s **(B) brash confidence that he will win back his losses**.

The passage indicates in line 4 that Fleur had already won thirty dollars from the men playing cards. Line 35 also indicates that Lily “had been stalking this night for weeks.” Clearly, Lily wishes to raise the pot and win back his losses, a fact further verified by his wagering all his bills and coins on the last hand. He is particularly buoyed by the fact that Fleur has lost some hands early in the game and believes she is ultimately bluffing.

18. The author mirrors Lily's changing fortunes and attitude through which of the following?

- I. The demeanor and body language of his dog.
- II. The changing size of the pot on the table.
- III. The facial expressions of the other card players.

(C) I and II.

When Fleur is holding up the game, the dog is seen trembling, "alive with rage" (line 26). When Lily is winning, the dog is said to be "stiff [. . .] poised on Lily's knees, a ball of vicious muscle with its yellow eyes slit in concentration" (lines 45-48). The narrator further states that "It gave advice, seemed to sniff the lay of Fleur's cards, twitched and nudged" (lines 48-50). Later, it whines (line 62) to suggest its agreement with Lily that Fleur is bluffing. This validates I. The pot, which at first is limited to a few cents, "grew, round by round, until it held all the money" (lines 52-53). This corroborates the correctness of II. Other than Fleur's winning grin, no mention is made of the expressions on the faces of the other players.

19. The narrator likely describes Lily's voice as "choked with burrs" (line 76) to illustrate his **(E) ire**.

Since "burrs" are irritating nettles, it is pretty clear that Lily is furious at the outcome of the game, so angry that he can barely talk.

20. Which of the following pairs of words captures the impression of Fleur that the author **MOST** wishes to convey to the reader? **(C) cunning and conniving.**

Fleur is said to have a "wolf grin" (lines 70-71), suggestive of animal-like cunning. Moreover, she is described as playing "unevenly" (line 43) in order to entice the men into wagering more aggressively. She is also said to have "reeled them in" (lines 44-45). This is best represented by choice C.

21. The author draws an ironic and incongruous connection between the two principal characters in the episode through which of the following? **(B) their names.**

Fleur is French for flower while Lily is a flower. This connection is ironic because they are antagonists.

22. The passage subtly intimates which of the following?

- I. That after collecting her winnings Fleur will resign from her arduous job.
- II. That the “real game” (line 33) does not necessarily involve card-playing.
- III. That, as a result of her winning, Fleur may be a victim of violence.

(D) II and III.

The passage has some subtle undertones, the first evidenced by lines 3-6, “A month running, Fleur had won thirty dollars and only Pete’s presence had kept Lily at bay.” This suggests that Lily is a threat to Fleur. The narrator also indicates that Lily “had been stalking this night for weeks” (line 35). The word “stalking” has a predatory connotation, and while part of this is clearly his desire to get back his losses, the intimation is that he plans to do so through the card game or, if necessary, by other means. This, coupled with the description of Fleur’s drenched and skin-tight attire (lines 14-16), lends the scene a subtle eroticism that is reminiscent of the card game in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

23. Which of the following demonstrates the literary device known as synaesthesia? **(E) “The heat lowered like a bell.” (line 56).**

This technique combines two disparate senses in a uniquely imagistic way. Here, heat (feeling) is described in terms of a bell (sound).

24. Which of the following is NOT characteristic of the author’s style? **(E) ubiquitous symbols of imminent death.**

Erdrich’s style is very much like that of Ernest Hemingway, primarily characterized by terse, simple sentences and succinct dialogue—e.g., “The game went on” (line 45), “Nobody folded” (line 53), “The heat lowered like a bell” (line 56). This tends to place the focus squarely on the events at the card table (A). As was delineated in the explanation to question #18, the dog, seated on Lily’s lap for the duration of the card game, almost functions as another character (B). At the conclusion of the game, Lily slams the dog on the table while Fleur hungrily sweeps up her winnings, jamming them inside her dress (C). Finally, the passage has only a single exchange of dialogue, the other lines being voiced by Lily in moments of impatience or as rhetorical questions (D). Though there are some skulls being boiled by Fleur in the back room, there are no ubiquitous symbols of death in the passage. This makes choice E the exception.

Passage Three: Edward Hirsch's "After the Last Practice"

Edward Hirsch's "After the Last Practice" may seem to some a surprising choice with its masculine football bent and its clearly greater appeal to a reading audience that is old enough to be nostalgic, but if the actual AP English exam can include a prose passage about the Cuban boxer Bernie Paret and a poem about a young girl's imaginary steed, it seemed quite legitimate to include Hirsch's poem both as an interesting piece of literature and as a counterpoise to the other content of the book. Hirsch's poem, ostensibly a colorful collage of high school football memories recalled by older men around a campfire in the woods, gradually evolves into something more than nostalgia—a consciousness of lost youth, of lost innocence, and of the stealthy but inexorable encroachment of age and death.

The first fourteen stanzas of the poem provide a highly imagistic potpourri of the world of high school football, plunging the reader into the sights, smells, sounds and feelings of the gridiron. The rituals of pre-game preparation—of coaches intently diagramming plays on blackboards, of players pulling on jerseys, scraping their spikes on concrete, slamming their forearms into lockers, or pounding the shoulder-pads of teammates, of the antithetical mingling of anxious queasiness and equally anxious adrenaline; the archetypal Middle American setting of flat Midwestern fields stretching endlessly into the horizon, of the cold crispness of a typical November afternoon with the smell of burning leaves permeating the air, of family and sweethearts crowding the stands and lifting their ecstatic roar of support; the painful price of gladiatorial combat—the bruised arms, blackened eyes, aching muscles and torn ligaments, of the emotional ecstasy of “breaking loose from a tackle / And romping for daylight, for the green / Promised land of the end zone” (lines 70-72) and the agony of the “Thirteen-hour drive home after [having] bruised / A collarbone on the last play of the game / The whole bus encased in silence like a glass / Jar [. . .]” (lines 80-83)—all are recalled with a curious mixture of pride, exhilaration, and confusion. As the speaker admits, “not / One of us could explain why he had done it. / What use now is the language of traps / And draws, of power-sweeps and desperate on-side / Kicks, of screen passes, double reverses?” (lines 62-66). And yet, as his friend remarks, there were moments when he “felt as if [he] would explode with happiness, / As if [he] would never falter, waver, or die [. . .]” (lines 77-78).

The final three stanzas present a polar image—one of men of indeterminate age (but whose boyhoods have clearly been left behind) gathered like grim specters around a sputtering and smoldering campfire. Veiled by the night and the “ghostly woodsmoke” (line 86), they once more huddle together “as if [they] were partly warriors / And partly Boy Scouts ringed around the flame, / Holding [their] helmets in [their] arms and trying / To understand an old appetite for glory” (lines 87-90). Trapped like Polynices in some indeterminate nether world—some mapless matrix between boyhood and adulthood, between adolescence and maturity—they gradually fall silent, unable to comprehend how quickly glory fades, lives vanish. In many ways this scene recalls early Anglo-Saxon poems such as “The Seafarer” and “The Wanderer,” whose protagonists, finding their lord and friends killed, their mead-halls and villages wasted, roam aimlessly, searching for direction and *guerdon*. As the fire, a mirror of their own gradual disintegration, “[glowers] down to embers and ashes, / To red bits of nothing” (lines 96-97), so they feel themselves “burning, burning, burning, burning...” (line 98). The song that someone intones in the final line, while perhaps a typical campfire ditty, should probably be seen as a metaphorical dirge, like Don McLean's anthematic tribute to the “day the music died.” The friends are painfully conscious that their “raging, innocent, violent, American / Boyhoods [are] gone now, vanished forever / Like the victories and the hard losses” (lines 91-93); however, they seem clueless as to how those voids may be filled.

Hirsch's poem reminds me of the many colleagues I have known over the years who eagerly anticipated retirement only to find that, once they had attained it, they had an abundance of time on their hands which they did not know how to fill. There are only so many holes of golf one can play before that too becomes hackneyed. I also think here of Tom Buchanan in *The Great Gatsby*, who the narrator Nick Carraway observes "had achieved such an acute, limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savor[ed] of anti-climax." Nick further notes how he felt Tom would "drift on forever seeking a little wistfully for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game." Hirsch's poem ultimately suggests that though high school athletics may provide fond memories of gridiron glory, these cannot become the sum and substance of one's life. The poem ends with an embarrassingly poignant silence since, their memories of high school having been resurrected and revisited, the friends have essentially nothing left to say.

25. The main focus of the poem involves the **(B) fleeting nature of youth and glory**.

From the word “remember” in line 1 it is apparent that the poem is about the past, and as the companions contribute more specific memories it is apparent that it is about the world of high school football. However, it is not until relatively late in the poem that the theme of lost youth and glory fully emerges. Despite the bruises and more serious injuries, the tedious bus rides and arduous practices, the stomach-churning anxiety and nervous jitters, it is clear from lines such as “the green / Promised land of the end zone” (lines 71-72) and “I felt as if I would explode with happiness, / As if I would never falter, waver, or die...” (lines 77-78) that these were the halcyon days, days of youth and glory and triumph. Beginning with line 85, however, the tone of the poem changes as the companions, recognizing their age and position in life, sit about the campfire “Holding [their] helmets in [their] arms and trying / To understand an old appetite for glory, / [Their] raging, innocent, violent, American / Boyhoods gone now, vanished forever / Like the victories and the hard losses” (lines 89-93). The fire that sputters and glowers down into ashes and the speaker’s comment that they were “burning, burning, burning...” (line 98) symbolize this as well.

26. The tone of the poem is BEST labeled **(E) nostalgic**.

Nostalgia suggests a yearning for the past, for a time when things were better than they are at present. Though no specifics are provided as to the present economic or social successes of the companions, their preoccupation with their high school football days and their yearning for the triumph and glory of the high school gridiron suggests that this was the best time of their lives.

27. All of the following help to reinforce the sensory nature of the first two stanzas EXCEPT **(E) “the tension mounting all day [. . .]” (line 10)**.

Sensory imagery features words that appeal to the senses. The onomatopoeic “crack” of the shoulderpads (A), the multicolored bruises that “blossom” on the players’ arms (B), the “faint, medicinal smell” of ointment in the locker room (C), and the onomatopoeic “hiss” of the steaming showers (D) all qualify in this regard. Choice E does not.

28. The most common feeling displayed by the players *before* the contest is **(B) apprehension**.

The speaker talks about the “tension mounting all day” (line 10), how it was manifest in the “sound of spikes clattering / Across the locker room floor, the low banter / Of the last players pulling on their jerseys, / Our middle-linebacker humming to himself / And hammering a forearm against the lockers [. . .]” (lines 11-15). He also remembers how “a huge pit opened up in your stomach / And the steady buzz of a crowd in the distance / Turned into a minor roaring in your skull [. . .]” (lines 21-23) as well as how “The jitters never disappeared until the opening / Kickoff [. . .]” (lines 25-26). Choice B captures this best.

29. The sixth and seventh stanzas of the poem (lines 31-42) do which of the following?

- I. Provide a measure of local color by introducing the reader to a specific geographical setting.
- II. Imagistically reinforce the friends' enduring camaraderie.
- III. Symbolically mirror the teammates' vanishing youth.

(E) I, II and III.

The sixth stanza introduces us to the Midwestern setting of endless golden cornfields set against a dark November sky (I). The seventh stanza, in particular line 37, "The smoky glow of faces around a small fire," imagistically buttresses the boys' enduring friendship (II). Moreover, the wooden fence posts and miles of empty cornfields that they pass in the team bus can be seen as symbols of passing time (III); hence, the selection of E as the best answer.

30. Lines 44-45—"Jesus, someone said, I never thought it would end / Like this, without pads, without hitting anybody"—are primarily intended to **(A) intimate subtly that the players' adult lives have been anticlimactic.**

The phrase "I never thought it would end like this" suggests disappointment, an outcome that is somehow polar to what they expected. The closing words "without pads, without hitting anybody" possibly imply that they have not made any impact as adults, that their best days are behind them.

31. The memories presented in lines 46-61 **(A) celebrate individual character and toughness.**

These lines present a catalog of endured pain and injury, of "getting blindsided by a bone-wrenching tackle" (line 47), of suffering and tolerating ligament tears and ankle sprains and black eyes, of enduring grueling 'two-a-days' in the summer heat. This is best represented by choice A.

32. The diction and imagery in stanzas twelve and thirteen (lines 67-78) are suggestive of all of the following EXCEPT **(D) transience and mortality.**

The memories of a "sharp cut" (line 67), of executing a perfect play, breaking free of a tackle, and "romping for daylight, for the green / Promised land of the end zone" (lines 71-72) confirm A, B, and C. The memories of seeing his girlfriend "in the stands at midfield— / [with] everyone around her... chanting and shouting" (lines 74-75), and of feeling "as if [he] would explode with happiness, / As if [he] would never falter, waver, or die..." (lines 77-78) confirm E. This makes D the exception.

33. The Boy Scout-warrior dichotomy, mentioned in lines 87-88, reinforces which of the following contrasts? **(B) youth and maturity.**

Being a Boy Scout is a childhood activity; hunting in the woods is an adult one.

34. The speaker's comment that they were all "burning, burning, etc" (line 98) may plausibly be interpreted as which of the following?

I. Desiring to be young again.
II. Rapidly passing into insignificance.
III. Becoming irate over their lost youth.

(C) I and II.

Clearly the recollection of these high school memories makes them want to return to their "glory days" (I). At the same time, like the smoldering and sputtering fire, their adult lives are passing as quickly as wooden fence posts seen through a bus window (II). There is no sense of anger in the poem, only one of subdued reflection.

35. Which of the following contributes LEAST to the contemplative mood of the last three stanzas? **(B) the comparison "as if we were partly warriors / And partly Boy Scouts [. . .]" (lines 87-88).**

The word "sputtering" suggests a fire about to go out. The terse sentences in choice C reinforce the deep subdued quiet that enfolds the companions as they sit about the campfire. The alliterative trio of "deep," "descended" and "disintegrated" also suggests a dying down, a dissolution. Much like the word "sputtering," the word "glowering" suggests fading light but no crackling sound. This validates choices A, C, D and E. Choice B contributes nothing in this regard.

36. In the course of the poem, the poet uses simile to depict each of the following EXCEPT **(C) the facial bruises that were the by-product of practice.**

The November sky is said to be "like a dome / Covering a chilly afternoon [. . .]" (lines 33-34), the windmills to move their blades "as if underwater [. . .]" (line 42). The quiet after a loss is said to be "like a glass / Jar, like the night itself [. . .]" (lines 82-83), while their boyhoods are said to vanish forever "Like the victories and the hard losses" (line 93). The speaker describes the facial bruises through the implied metaphor of a "black coin" (line 50).

37. When one considers the context in which it appears, which of the following is NOT intended to contribute to the transitory nature of the teammates' adolescent athletic experiences? **(A) "The smoky glow of faces around a small fire." (line 37).**

As was expounded upon in the explanation to question #30, the compatriots voice in choice B their frustration over not having made an impact in life. The rhetorical question in choice C suggests that the complex plays they learned in football have had no relevance in their adult lives. Choices D and E suggest that they still burn for past glory. Choice A merely provides an image of camaraderie around a campfire.

38. Which of the following mirrors the diminishing significance of the individuals and their exploits on the football field?

- I. The ambiguity and inconsistency of their recollections.
- II. The poet's use of indefinite personal pronouns in lieu of names.
- III. The symbol of the sputtering and smoldering fire.

(D) II and III.

The sputtering and smoldering fire (III), directly connected to the companions by line 98, has already been sufficiently explicated. The fact that there are no names, only lines that begin with "Someone said" (line 1) and "Someone else remembered" (line 4), suggests that they have blurred into anonymity and insignificance (II). The clarity of their high school recollections eliminates I from consideration.

39. All of the following are stylistic traits of the poem EXCEPT **(D) a contrast between youth and infirmity.**

The recollections are made by different individuals in the poem, and the poem is filled with the language of football such as "desperate on-side / Kicks, screen passes, double reverses" (lines 65-66). These validate the presence of A and B. The description of players stretching, being taped, pulling on jerseys, etc. and the largely structured six line stanzaic pattern of free verse confirm C and E. There is no contrast between youth and infirmity in the poem.

Passage Four: From Ben Jonson's "On Style"

The final short-answer passage in Sample Examination One provides a stiff test for the young reader primarily because of its age. Still, despite its occasional rugged syntax and archaic diction, it is generally accessible and a good benchmark by which to determine a student's comfort level with literature from earlier centuries.

Like many others of his trade have done and continue to do, Jonson weighs in on the defining traits of good writers and good writing. His initial sentence—"For a man to write well there are required three necessities—to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and much exercise of his own style" (lines 1-4)—suggests that the key ingredients involve reading and listening to the best writers and regularly practicing one's own craft. Jonson places additional importance on careful selection of subject (and the genre most apropos to it) as well as diligent attention to diction and syntax. His advice that, "No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be labored and accurate; seek the best and be not glad of the forward conceits or first words that offer themselves to us, but judge of what we invent, and order what we approve" (lines 12-17), suggests that in order to effect the best possible product, a writer must be patient, self-critical and painstaking. In fact, he goes so far as to advocate rewriting passages that have already been written, claiming that "it helps the consequence, and makes the juncture better, it quickens the heat of imagination, that often cools in the time of setting down, and gives it new strength, as if it grew lustier by the going back" (lines 18-23). Using the analogy of a javelin toss by which "we force back our arms to make our loose the stronger" (lines 26-27), Jonson suggests that revisiting what one has written enables a writer to progress further with his argument or narrative. At the same time Jonson seems to be conscious of a "writer's groove" since he acknowledges that "if [the writer has] a fair gale of wind, I forbid not the steering out of [his] sail, so the favor of the gale deceive [him] not" (lines 28-30).

Still, Jonson cautions the writer against falling in love with the first words that readily come into his mind—"For all that we invent doth please us in the conception of our birth, else we would never set it down" (lines 30-32)—avowing that the safest course is always to "to return to our judgment, and handle over again those things the easiness of which might make them justly suspected" (lines 33-36). Suggesting that this is what the best writers have always done, Jonson compacts his advice into a concise paradox: "So that the sum of all is, ready writing makes not good writing, but good writing brings on ready writing" (lines 45-47). Jonson further warns writers against becoming over-confident, suggesting that "it is even then good to resist [this sense of self-satisfaction], as to give a horse a check sometimes with a bit, which doth not so much stop his course as stir his mettle" (lines 48-51). At the same time, Jonson antithetically urges that a writer must continually stretch his limits, "should more and more contend, lift and dilate [him]self; as men of low stature raise themselves on their toes, and so oft-times get even, if not eminent" (lines 53-56).

Jonson's closing comments then shift from writers in general to the novice writer, suggesting that he go to school on the works of writers of established reputation for lessons in subject and presentation:

For the mind and memory are more sharply exercised in comprehending another man's things than our own; and such as accustom themselves and are familiar with the best authors shall ever and anon find somewhat of them in themselves, and in the expression of their minds, even when they feel it not, be able to utter something like theirs, which hath an authority above their own (lines 62-71).

Though a writer may have a predilection for a certain type of writing, Jonson staunchly maintains that he “must exercise all” (lines 75-76) and become adept at all different structures and genres. Drawing upon music for his concluding metaphor, Jonson observes that “For as in an instrument, so in style, there must be harmony and consent of parts” (lines 76-78). This implies that like an orchestra, in which various instruments playing various melodic lines combine in one harmonious whole, so the varied aspects of style—be they diction, syntax, figurative language or tone—must function in a similarly concordant manner.

Jonson’s essay provides a short but eloquent primer on good writing which, despite its age, probably is equally applicable to teaching composition in the present day.

40. The author's tone is BEST characterized as **(E) didactic**.

From the very first sentence—"For a man to write well there are required three necessities—to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and much exercise of his own style" (lines 1-4)—Jonson's intent to instruct is abundantly clear. The passage is pretty much a primer for aspiring writers, a "how to" guide to becoming a writer and developing one's craft. Choice E captures this best.

41. In advancing his argument the author makes use of all of the following EXCEPT **(A) subtle sarcasm that reveals his disfavor of novice writers**.

Choice B is apparent in lines such as "Then take care, in placing and ranking both matter and words, that the composition be comely [. . .]" (lines 9-11) or "Repeat often what we have formerly written [. . .]" (lines 17-18), Choice C in his comparisons to jumping and javelin throwing (lines 23-27) and later to horseback riding (lines 49-51). Choice D is verified by the speaker's observation that "ready writing makes not good writing, but good writing brings on ready writing" (lines 45-47), Choice E in lines such as "For all that we invent doth please us in the conception of our birth, else we would never set it down" (lines 30-32). Nowhere does he suggest a distaste for novice writers.

42. The allusions to jumping and javelin throwing in lines 23-27 are primarily intended to buttress the author's conviction about the importance of **(B) repeating what one has previously written to strengthen it**.

Jonson suggests that repeating what one has already written "gives it new strength, as if it grew lustier by the going back" (lines 22-23). The allusions to broad-jumping and javelin throwing are made because in both sports the length of the jump or throw is determined by the force with which one makes it. The javelin toss seems the more apropos of the two since the length of the throw is directly proportional to how much we "force back our arms to make our loose the stronger" (lines 26-27).

43. Which of the following may safely be said about lines 28-30?

- I. They are an admonition against insufficiently thought out developments in the plot.
- II. They seemingly contradict the author's earlier comment that "No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be labored and accurate [. . .]" (lines 12-13).
- III. They reflect the author's concession that there may be moments when a writer must flow with his inspiration or rhythm.

(D) II and III.

Jonson's allusion to letting out more sail to take advantage of a favorable wind is mildly antithetical to his earlier admonition to young writers to proceed with deliberation and caution (II). However, it also suggests that there are moments when rules are to be broken (III). The "fair gale of wind" (line 28) symbolizes a time of rhythm or inspiration in which the writer finds the going easy. Even so, Jonson nevertheless cautions that "the safest is to return to our judgment, and handle over again those things the easiness of which might make them justly suspected" (lines 33-36).

44. The simile couched in lines 47-51 warns writers against becoming **(B) overconfident**.

The phrase “when we think we have got the faculty” (lines 47-48) translates roughly in contemporary terms into “when we think we have got the hang of it.” It is in these moments that Jonson believes it is good to “give a horse a check sometimes with a bit, which doth not so much stop his course as stir his mettle” (lines 49-51)—in short, to rein ourselves in a bit. Choice B represents this idea best.

45. Lines 52-54, “Again, whither a man’s genius is best able to reach, thither it should more and more contend [. . .],” suggest that when a writer is at the height of his creative powers he should **(D) be more daring in the scope and reach of his literary endeavors**.

The word “contend,” in this context, is best read as “strive towards.” The intimation here is that one should aspire as far as one’s talents allow. The simile that follows—“as men of low stature raise themselves on their toes, and so oft-times get even, if not eminent” (lines 54-56)—alludes to men of shorter stature who raise themselves on their toes so they can look taller than their peers, essentially exceeding their natural limitations. Choice D reflects this best.

46. The author suggests that all writers—particularly novice ones—should “accustom themselves” (line 65) to the best authors for which of the following reasons?

- I. To discover some part of themselves in a more established writer’s voice or material.
- II. To expose themselves to other styles and genres of writing.
- III. To utilize these authors’ works as exemplars they might imitate.

(E) I, II and III.

Jonson’s suggestion that by studying other writers novices may “find somewhat of them in themselves” (line 67) confirms I, while his suggestion that “though a man be more prone and able for one kind of writing than another, yet he must exercise all” (lines 73-76) validates II. III is evident in Jonson’s observation that they may “in the expression of their minds, even when they feel it not, be able to utter something like theirs, which hath an authority above their own” (lines 68-71).

47. Which of the following does NOT paraphrase advice given by Jonson as to how best to effect good writing? **(C) Establish your own, unique style that has not been influenced by writers who have come before you.**

Choice A is confirmed by lines 5-6, “consider what ought to be written, and after what manner [. . .],” choice B by lines 9-11, “Then take care, in placing and ranking both matter and words, that the composition be comely.” Choice D is supported by lines 16-17, “judge of what we invent, and order what we approve,” and also lines 33-36, “But the safest is to return to our judgment, and handle over again those things the easiness of which might make them justly suspected.” Choice E is backed by lines 47-51, “Yet, when we think we have got the faculty, it is even then good to resist it, as to give a horse a check sometimes with a bit, which doth not so much stop his course as stir his mettle” and also by lines 30-32, “For all that we invent doth please us in the conception of our birth, else we would never set it down.” Choice C garners no support from the passage.

48. In the course of his essay, the author draws comparisons to all of the following EXCEPT **(B) government**.

The comparisons to athletic competition (A) are evident in the aforementioned broad-jump and javelin throw in lines 23-27, the comparison to horseback riding (C) in lines 49-51. The comparison to sailing (D) is apparent in lines 28-30, "Yet, if we have a fair gale of wind, I forbid not the steering out of our sail, so the favor of the gale deceive us not," and the comparison to music (E) in the final three lines of the passage, "For as in an instrument, so in style, there must be harmony and consent of parts." There is no comparison made to government by the author.

49. In light of the context in which each word is embedded, which of the following would be the LEAST suitable replacement for one of the archaisms listed below? **(B) "common" for "forward" (line 14)**.

While all of the other substitutions are plausible ones, the word "forward" in this context actually means "first to come to mind;" thus, B is the exception.

50. Ironically, a purist might find Jonson's opening sentence to be marred by which of the following? **(A) faulty parallelism**.

Jonson somewhat awkwardly matches two infinitive phrases ("to read the best authors, [to] observe the best speakers") with a noun followed by a prepositional phrase ("exercise of his own style").

51. The passage ultimately makes what point about professional writers? **(B) They hone their craft by degrees**.

The choice of B as the best answer is pretty much based on the passage as a whole since throughout the entire seventy-eight lines Jonson has indicated that good writing requires the reading of other writers, the imitation of their style, consideration of the appropriate content and genre of one's work, constant practice, revision, and a host of other "writing practices" that take time to master.

Explication of Free-Response Question One: Michael Waters' "The Mystery of the Caves"

Sometimes a deceptively simple piece may reveal itself to be much more complex than originally considered, and Michael Waters' poem, "The Mystery of the Caves," proves a fine example of that. This readily accessible, forty-line poem, proportionately divided into ten four-line stanzas, at first seems little more than a poem about a boy reading a story about a similarly aged boy lost in a cave, but further consideration of the poem reveals an undercurrent of mythological possibilities and troubling domestic strife.

In this task students were requested to examine "how the poet uses images and symbols to link the predicament of the lost boy to the domestic situation of the speaker." In some ways this poem seems filled with Pirandellian mirrors, the reader reading a story about a boy remembering a story he himself has read. The speaker describes how the boy-hero of the story "was lost, / wandering a labyrinth of caverns / filling stratum by stratum with water" (lines 2-4). The outcome for the hero was ambiguous: "would he float upward toward light? / Or would he somersault forever / in an underground black river?" (lines 6-8). The dilemma of the fictional hero quickly merges with the dilemma of the speaker, who reveals that "[his] mother was leaving again— / the lid of the trunk thrown open, / blouses torn from their hangers, / the crazy shouting among rooms" (lines 11-14). The scene the speaker is describing—an all-too-common one of domestic strife—represents his particular form of entrapment in an overwhelming domestic situation from which he sees no respite, no escape. The fact that his mother was leaving "again" implies that this scene has been repeated on more than one occasion, that the "crazy shouting among rooms" is the norm, not the exception.

Like his fictional counterpart who is seeking an escape from the rising water in the caves, the speaker finds it "impossible to see / which passage [leads] to safety" (lines 15-16). As the cave-trapped boy holds the wavering "yellow finger of flame" (line 17) of his last match, peering desperately into the darkness for any signs of an egress, the speaker finds himself in a hostile vortex of breaking perfume bottles and a mother caught in the violent hands of an angry and abusive father. As lines 23-25 suggest, the speaker feels equally helpless in his real and fictional worlds, too distant to help his desperate counterpart, too small to intercede on behalf of his hysterically sobbing mother. Lines 31-32, "I can't recall the whole story, / what happened at the end..." on one level suggest that the speaker has forgotten the outcome of the story, on another that he has partially repressed a painful memory.

The final two stanzas of the poem pull the fortunes of the speaker and the trapped boy in the story into even closer proximity. When the speaker says in lines 33-36

Sometimes I worry that the boy
is still searching below the earth
for a thin pencil of light,
that I can almost hear him

the reader wonders whether the boy he is searching for is the boy in the fictional story, or a youthful version of himself; whether the "thin pencil of light" that he mentions is a miraculous exit for his cave-bound companion, or his way out of the "My Papa's Waltz" situation he once found himself in. Are these painful memories of a distant past, or psychological demons of the present that he has yet to exorcise? Of particular interest is the word "pencil" since it offers a quite plausible interpretation that writing about

these memories is his only way to eradicate them. Moreover, when the speaker suggests in lines 36-40 that he can almost hear the trapped boy

through great volumes of water,
through centuries of stone,
crying my name among blind fish,
wanting so much to come home

the reader feels his keen sense of alienation and abandonment ("among blind fish") as well as his frustrated desire for domestic bliss.

In terms of images and symbols, the student has quite a store from which to choose. As to the boy in the story, the "labyrinth of caverns" (line 3) may be seen as symbolizing the trappings of his situation, his inability to see any way out. The "underground black river" (line 8) serves a similar symbolic purpose, suggesting a powerful natural force which buffets him about and threatens to submerge him, one over which he can exert no control. The "One yellow finger of flame" (line 17), his solitary match, and the "thin pencil of light" (line 35) that he searches for above, represent his last hope of escape, while the fact that "The boy wasn't able to breathe" (line 23) suggests the growing desperation of his plight. These motifs of suffocation and drowning relate easily to the domestic situation of the speaker (abusive father, abandoning mother), a situation for which he is too small to have an answer. The image of the speaker's mother sitting "among bright islands of skirts / circling the rim of the bed" (lines 29-30) reinforces her isolation, while the images of "crazy shouting among rooms" (line 14) and his mother's "breaking miniature bottles" of perfume (lines 19-20) convey the contentiousness of the marriage. Moreover, the image of his "father gripping her, / but too tightly, by both arms" (lines 21-22) suggests his mother's helpless inability to do anything, making the reader wonder if the thrown-open trunk lid and smashing of miniature perfume bottles are merely an impotent histrionic display.

The theme of the journey home is an archetypal one, present in everything from the *Odyssey* to *The Hobbit*, though some like Thomas Wolfe have suggested that one "can't go home again." Whether home is a country, a domicile, or, as Warren coldly puts it in Frost's *The Death of the Hired Man*, "the place where, / when you have to go there, / They have to take you in," home remains for many a physical or psychological haven to which they are compelled to return, sometimes to recover bliss, other times to redress a wrong. Waters' poem also calls to mind the mythical Theseus following his string out of the labyrinth to safety. As someone whose own childhood was marred by similar scenes, this poem speaks very personally to me. I remember once equating my mother's crying after a particularly harrowing episode with my father to the incessant sirens I recall hearing as a first-grade student in 1960 when an airliner first plunged onto the streets of downtown Brooklyn—keening, agonizing, incessant ones. Waters' poem may be simple on the surface, but it has impressive depths that an ambitious student can enthusiastically plumb.

This question has been reprinted for your convenience.

Question One

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Read the following poem carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, indicate how the poet uses images and symbols to link the predicament of the lost boy to the domestic situation of the speaker.

The Mystery of the Caves

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>I don't remember the name of the story,
but the hero, a boy, was lost,
wandering a labyrinth of caverns
filling stratum by stratum with water.</p> <p>(5) I was wondering what might happen:
would he float upward toward light?
Or would he somersault forever
in an underground black river?</p> <p>(10) I couldn't stop reading the book
because I had to know the answer,
because my mother was leaving again—
the lid of the trunk thrown open,</p> <p>blouses torn from their hangers,
the crazy shouting among rooms.</p> <p>(15) The boy found it impossible to see
which passage led to safety.</p> <p>One yellow finger of flame
Wavered on his last match.
There was a blur of perfume,
(20) my mother breaking miniature bottles,</p> | <p>then my father gripping her,
but too tightly, by both arms.
The boy wasn't able to breathe.
I think he wanted me to help,</p> <p>(25) but I was small, and it was late.
And my mother was sobbing now,
no longer cursing her life,
repeating my father's name</p> <p>(30) among bright islands of skirts
circling the rim of the bed.
I can't recall the whole story,
What happened at the end...</p> <p>(35) Sometimes I worry that the boy
is still searching below the earth
for a thin pencil of light,
that I can almost hear him</p> <p>(40) through great volumes of water,
through centuries of stone,
crying my name among blind fish,
wanting so much to come home.</p> |
|--|--|

—Michael Waters

*From Parthenopi: New and Selected Poems (BOA Editions, 2001).
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Scoring Rubric for Free-Response Question One: Michael Waters' "The Mystery of the Caves"

- 8-9 These papers not only convey their authors' keen understanding of the link between the predicament of the lost boy and the domestic situation of the speaker, but also their clear perception as to how the poet establishes this connection through imagery and symbolism. Well-conceived, well-developed, and well-organized, these papers are marked by frequent and accurate references to the text, by an admirable ability to synthesize thought, and by a mature control over the elements of composition. Though not perfect, they clearly indicate the students' ability to read poetry skillfully and to show how the literary elements of the poem support the poem's theme.
- 6-7 These essays exhibit a solid understanding of Waters' poem, but are less adept at responding to the question. This may be due to inconsistencies in textual understanding, to a lesser ability to comprehend the link between the predicament of the lost boy and the domestic situation of the speaker, and/or to a lesser ability to show how this connection is manifested by the images and symbols of the poem. Though these essays reflect their writers' abilities to convey their points clearly, they feature less fluency, development or cogency than 9-8 papers.
- 5 These papers respond to the question on the Waters' poem in superficial, formulaic, inconsistent or insufficiently supported ways. They may rely primarily on paraphrase, but may still convey an implicit understanding of the poem and the task. The papers are generally written in a satisfactory manner, with occasional errors in composition or mechanics that do not impede the reader's understanding. Nevertheless, these essays lack the organization, persuasiveness and development of upper-half papers.
- 3-4 These lower-half essays generally suggest an incomplete or overly simplistic understanding of the poem or task, an inability to comprehend the link between the predicament of the lost boy and the domestic situation of the speaker and/or to understand how this connection is manifested by the images and symbols of the poem. Their arguments are often characterized by a misreading of the text, a failure to provide adequate support, or insufficient control over the elements of composition. In some instances they may consist entirely of paraphrase and/or feature acute problems in organization, clarity, fluency or development.
- 1-2 These essays compound the shortcomings of 3-4 papers. They often contain many serious and distracting errors in grammar or mechanics that preclude any successful response to the prompt. Though these essays may attempt to show how the predicament of the lost boy and the domestic situation of the speaker are connected, they are severely limited by deficiencies in organization, clarity, fluency or development.
- 0 Papers scored a zero make no more than a passing reference to the task.
- Papers given this score offer a blank or totally off-topic response.

Sample Student Essay One

Michael Waters' poem, "The Mystery of the Caves," is a masterful depiction of a small boy's confusion during his parents' vociferous fight contrasted with a book he is reading that portrays another young boy lost among the crevices of the earth. Through an array of images and symbols, Michael Waters correlates the boy's confounding situation to that of the lost boy in the story.

In the first five stanzas, Waters uses images of dark caverns and underground passages to connect the boy's disarrayed and disoriented situation to the predicament of the lost boy. The speaker is lost in his own head, trying to figure out why his parents are acting this way, with only a single flame to light the way. As explained in line 15, "The boy found it impossible to see which passage led to safety." The speaker cannot find the right passage to safety in his hostile home. Waters uses the images of torn clothes and trunks thrown open and "crazy shouting among rooms" to connect the chaotic house to a labyrinth of caverns. Both are extremely difficult to follow and seem to lead nowhere.

Michael Waters also uses symbols to represent both parallel narratives. For example, in line 7, the speaker says about the lost boy, "would he float upward toward light? Or would he somersault forever in an underground black river?" This is the same question he is asking about himself, only in his case he will somersault into his parents' divorce.

In the last five stanzas, the poem focuses on the story of the boy whose parents are fighting. The speaker explains how his mother is now sobbing, cursing his father's name and he is too young and too small to help. He feels helpless in his situation which is when he reconnects the night to the story of the lost boy. In line 31, the speaker says, "I can't recall the whole story, what happened at the end...". This is a symbol for his own situation. He does not know what will come of his parents' fight, or what will happen when it subsides. He then says, "Sometimes I worry that the boy is still searching below the earth for a thin pencil of light." He fears that he will be like the lost boy, searching for light in an otherwise dark and dismal childhood. This relates the speaker to the lost boy and makes their situations almost analogous in meaning.

In conclusion, the poem, "The Mystery of the Caves," is a brilliant work that effectively parallels the story of the lost boy to the story of a boy trapped under his parents' abusive fighting. Through the use of images and symbols, Michael Waters weaves both stories together and successfully links the two, which makes the poem even more powerful.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in linking the predicament of the lost boy to the domestic situation of the speaker?

2. What images and/or symbols did the student identify? How effective were they in linking the predicaments of the two boys?

3. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Sample Student Essay Two

The poem "The Mystery of the Caves" eloquently links the peril of a young boy in a cavern with the situation of the real boy who is facing trouble in his family life. His mother has threatened to leave once more, and her and the father get into a fight, which ends with her sobbing. It is implied that the boy lives in an unstable family environment, and that he is perhaps reading this story about the young boy in the cavern to parallel his own life and make him feel better about the situation at hand. In fact, the lost boy in the caves truly represents the loss of the narrator's innocence, and the poet uses imagery and symbolism within both worlds to portray this.

When describing the real world of the narrator, the poet uses vivid imagery in order to create a sense of realism. However, he turns it into a memory by only choosing to accent several key things. Rather, the smaller details are mentioned, whereas the overall picture is generally either excluded, or only concisely mentioned. For example, it briefly states that the narrator's mother is leaving, but then goes into the finer details of the "blouses torn from their hangers" and the "crazy shouting" between the mother and father (11-14). Later, he mentions the "blur of perfume" from the mother smashing bottles, a minute detail which creates a more striking reality in the situation. Since the situation is a memory, the actual imagery has the qualities that a memory would. Most people do not remember things exactly, and often there will be one or two specific details that are more easily remembered than other parts of the situation. The narrator did not hear the specific words of the shouting, and therefore only stated it vaguely, but somehow remembered the mother repeating the name of the father (28). Shortly, the mother is sobbing amidst the clothing she has strewn from her trunk earlier, and the narrator uses vivid metaphor to enforce this imagery by calling the skirts "bright islands" (29). However, the true worth of this piece is measured by the way that the poet skillfully includes and intertwines the story of the young boy with the story of the narrator.

Within the world of the young boy, who is lost within a cavern, the poet uses grave symbolism and imagery to show the desperate situation. He sets up the situation by stating that the boy is lost amongst a maze-like cavern filling with water. Then, he states a simple series of rhetorical questions to state that he does not know whether or not the boy will survive. However, the diction he uses to describe the two choices clearly has connotation. For instance, he asks whether the boy will "float" to safety, something which implies lightness and a lack of suffering. On the other end of the spectrum, he asks whether the boy will "somersault forever in an underground black river," a question which holds grave power and implies, perhaps not death, but a lack of escape from the situation. The narrator wished to know the answer very much, but was interrupted in his reading by his mother throwing clothes into the trunk. However, as if this didn't happen at all, he continues telling the story of the boy, who cannot see where he is and lights a match. Then, once again, the story is interrupted by the arguing within the real world. Suddenly, the boy's situation has worsened, for he cannot breathe and, though he wishes for help, can find none. The narrator believes that he could be this source of help. The story never ends, however, because the narrator never finishes it. He assumes that perhaps the boy is still beneath the earth, searching for escape from the water, even though he would be presumably dead. The imagery of a young boy searching for that "pencil thin" light shows the hopelessness of his situation, and yet the fact that, throughout centuries he still cries for the narrator, creates an eerie surrealism to the scene overall. The poet uses the imagery in a powerful way to convey the different emotions of the boy within the cavern, and the boy in the real world.

Conclusively, the boy in the cavern and the boy in the real world must be somehow related. Due to the choppy nature of the poem, in which the narrative skips over between the two stories, it appears evident that the young boy calling for help is the victim of the arguments of the parents in the real world.

This young boy, lost within the cavern, living precariously, is actually the very innocence of the narrator. The narrator has fallen victim to the arguments of his parents and though he himself never expresses fear or remorse, it is his complete innocence which is hurt through the process, being buried underneath the callous facade that such a situation creates in a developing child. Therefore, the imagery that the narrator uses is a way to show how this boy was affected by the problems in his family life.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in linking the predicament of the lost boy to the domestic situation of the speaker?

2. What images and/or symbols did the student identify? How effective were they in linking the predicaments of the two boys?

3. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Sample Student Essay Three

In poem "The Mystery of the Caves," Michael Waters explores the "caves" of his own childhood, specifically a painful and repressed memory involving a fight between his parents. Waters uses symbols that link his self-exploration to a young boy lost in a cave, as well as images that illustrate the nature of his domestic situation and involve the reader in an exploration of his past.

Waters uses symbolism as an alternative to explaining to the reader that he was exploring his mind to uncover the past. He describes his memory as an enormous, complex "labyrinth" which suggests that the memory that he describes shortly thereafter could have been easily lost and never recovered. Later in the poem Waters refers to a "passage" that would lead him to safety or the overcoming of this difficult memory. This connects to the symbolic conveyance of his mind and memory as a labyrinth of caves. In line 6, Waters wonders if the boy would "float upward towards the light," therefore reach salvation and go beyond the pain of the memory he has uncovered. On the following line the author suggests that perhaps the boy will instead "somersault forever in an underground black river". Waters deliberately uses the color black to convey a feeling of despair, or a loss of hope. In line 25, the author remembers himself as a boy and calls himself "small". The word works in many ways illustrating that he is physically young, but also demonstrating how insignificant he felt, and how though he wanted to help his mother he felt helpless. In the stanza preceding this line, the author suggests that as the memory slowly exposed itself piece by piece, the "boy" in the labyrinth of Waters' mind (Waters) began to suffocate or attempt to re-repress the remaining parts of the memory.

Waters uses a vast array of imagery to portray to the reader his domestic situation, as well as attempt to draw the readers further into their own pasts as he delves into his. The first taste of imagery in the poem is at the end of the first stanza, when he describes the caverns as "filling stratum by stratum with water." This suggests his overwhelming feeling of suffocation and his feeling that he must run quickly away from the danger of losing himself in the caves of his past. In the third and fourth stanzas, Waters vividly describes the way the clothes are scattered as his mother leaves "again". By focusing on the blouses "torn from their hangers" as well as the lid of the trunk "thrown open," Waters paints the reader a mental picture of the chaotic nature of his domestic situation. In line 19, Waters tells the reader of a "blur of perfume," this line serving to incite the reader to remember his own mothers' perfume, and therefore capture the reader's attention on a more personal level. This level of closeness that Waters gains with the reader allows the reader to follow him more intimately through his past.

The final two stanzas of the poem deliver to the reader Waters' emotions and true feeling that, while he explores the memories of his past, he will never uncover them all.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in linking the predicament of the lost boy to the domestic situation of the speaker?

2. What images and/or symbols did the student identify? How effective were they in linking the predicaments of the two boys?

3. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Author's Response to Sample Student Essays on Michael Waters' "The Mystery of the Caves"**Sample Student Essay One:**

This paper offers a very solid response to the prompt. The student immediately associates the boy's "disarrayed and disoriented situation" to that of the boy "lost among the crevices of the earth." He cites images of "torn clothes and trunks torn open" to show the turbulence of the marriage and connects "the chaotic house to a labyrinth of caverns." The student focuses upon the word "somersault" to connect the tumbling of the underground boy with his own sense of upheaval. He also links the "pencil of light" with his own search for light in a "dark and dismal childhood." The student's vocabulary ("vociferous," "confounding," "analogous") is sophisticated, and the paper itself has good unity and fluency, though further development would have yielded a higher score.

Author's Score: low 7**Sample Student Essay Two:**

Though the second student's response is significantly longer, it is not necessarily better. This paper, while generally competent in both compositional skill and analytical insight, lacks the fluency of the previous response in conveying the connection between the situations of the two boys. Though not overtly addressing the symbolic, it does a pretty thorough job with the imagery, suggesting that the selectivity of detail by the speaker helps create the sense of blurred childhood memory that marks the poem. Though it is clear that the writer understands the link between the speaker and the boy trapped in the underground cavern, the paper is tarnished in spots by redundant language ("Then, he states a simple series of rhetorical questions to state [. . .]"), grammatical incorrectness ("her and the father"), and less than optimal word choice ("callous facade"). That said, this response is thorough and perceptive enough to nudge its way into the upper-half.

Author's Score: 6**Sample Student Essay Three:**

This paper provides a useful reminder of the great variety that can exist within a given score point. In many ways this paper has elements of both of the previous ones, showing some of the strength of insight of the first and some of the weakness of language of the second. For much of the essay the writer takes a one-lane road—the idea of repressed memory—but travels down it in occasionally profound ways. His idea that the speaker's "mind and memory [are] a labyrinth of caves" is a good one as is his suggestion that the speaker may be trying to suppress this memory. The writer also scores well with his claim that the rapidly rising cave-waters symbolize the speaker's "overwhelming feeling of suffocation and his feeling that he must run quickly away from the danger of losing himself in the caves of his past." His use of the clothes and opened trunk to reflect the "chaotic nature of the domestic situation" and his seeing the black river as reflecting "despair" are also commendable. While there are some clumsy constructions ("symbolic conveyance," "re-repress") that detract from the fluency of the essay, the idea was a good one that the student sustained well enough to earn the benefit of the doubt.

Author's Score: 7

Explication of Free-Response Question Two: From Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*

The second selection, a prose passage from Thomas Hardy's 1895 novel *Jude the Obscure*, offers a very different literary challenge. In this episode Sue Brideshead, Jude's desired but inaccessible beloved, having returned to Marygreen for the funeral of Jude's aunt, spends the night at a neighboring widow's cottage in painful proximity to the house in which Jude is staying. During a mutually sleepless night—Sue's due to her unhappy marriage, Jude's to the frustration of unrequited love—they are each further discomfited by the occasional cry of a hare caught by the leg in a trap. As their task, students were asked to “discuss how the literary elements of the passage reveal[ed] the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue.”

The best responses to this question will recognize the symbol (or metaphor) of the trapped rabbit and relate it to Sue's unhappy wedlock. Sue's protestation that ““They ought not to be allowed to set these steel traps, ought they!”” (lines 26-27) clearly functions on both literal and figurative levels. The passage's final paragraph, in which Sue poignantly declares marriage ““a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting!...”” (lines 40-41), confirms the sense of entrapment she feels in her marriage to Phillotson (her husband in the novel). Though Sue bemoans her naiveté in so hastily committing to marriage, calling herself ““idiotic”” and a ““fool”” (lines 42-43), like Kate Chopin's protagonist Edna Pontellier she assumes the voice of *all* women bound to unhappy relationships by the strict moral conventions of the time: ““I daresay it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick [. . .] When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say!’ [. . .]”” (lines 44-46). Moreover, she utters (for the time, at least) a heretical comment when she claims ““one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly!”” (lines 43-44). Figuratively, the narrator's graphic description of the trapped rabbit—if a ‘bad catch’ its hind leg-bone stripped of flesh; if a ‘good catch’ its foreleg bone shattered and its limbs ripped in two by its desperate efforts to escape—delineates an unhappy marriage as a tortuous, trapped existence; a *huit clos*, as Sartre would have it, from which the only liberation is death.

In terms of Jude the passage provides very different opportunities. For one he appears in a subordinate position in the episode, an impotent Romeo cloaked by the shadows outside the casement of Sue's window. Much as he'd saved the lives of earthworms as a child, he alleviates the concern Sue feels for the trapped rabbit by knocking it on the head and humanely ending its misery; however, he can do nothing to quell the misery of her marriage (other than serve as a confidant for her complaints) or to relieve the frustration and misery that he himself endures. (A Freudian criticism might make much of the fact that only Sue's upper half is revealed by the window). In an ironically romantic moment—in which Sue “let[s] go of the casement stay and put[s] her hand upon his, her moonlit face regarding him wistfully” (lines 29-30)—Jude finds, like the teacher mourning his dead student in Theodore Roethke's “Elegy for Jane,” that he has “no rights in this matter, / Neither father nor lover.”

The overall passage has a fatalistic tone, suggesting that, despite Cassius' confident avowal, the fault *is* indeed in the stars, not ourselves—or, if not, in the institutions and codes of conduct that circumscribe behavior and prevent individuals from pursuing their true desires. The astute student should see that both Jude and Sue are trapped “behind walls equally lonely and disheartened” (lines 2-3), and that in a bitterly ironic way their only avenue of escape is death.

This question has been reprinted for your convenience.

Question Two

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Read the following passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, discuss how the literary elements of the passage reveal the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue. In your essay, you may wish to consider such things as diction, choice of detail, symbolism, and tone.

In the lonely room of his aunt's house Jude sat watching the cottage of the Widow Edlin as it disappeared behind the night shade. He knew that Sue was sitting within its walls equally lonely and disheartened; and again questioned his devotional model that all was for the best.

- (5) He retired to rest early, but his sleep was fitful from the sense that Sue was so near at hand. At some time near two o'clock, when he was beginning to sleep more soundly, he was aroused by a shrill squeak that had been familiar enough to him when he lived regularly at Marygreen. It was the cry of a rabbit caught in a gin. As was the little creature's habit, it did not soon repeat its cry; and probably would not do so more than once or twice; but would remain bearing its torture to the morrow, when the trapper would come back and knock it on the head.

- (10) He who in his childhood had saved the lives of the earthworms now began to picture the agonies of the rabbit from its lacerated leg. If it were a 'bad catch' by the hind-leg, the animal would tug during the ensuing six hours till the iron teeth of the trap had stripped the leg-bone of its flesh, when, should a weak-sprung instrument enable it to escape, it would die in the field from the mortification of the limb. If it were a 'good catch,' namely, by the fore-leg, the bone would be broken, and the limb nearly torn in two in attempts at an impossible escape.

- (15) Almost half-an-hour passed, and the rabbit repeated its cry. Jude could rest no longer till he had put it out of his pain, so dressing himself quickly he descended, and by the light of the moon went across the green in the direction of the sound. He reached the hedge bordering the widow's garden, when he stood still. The faint click of the trap as dragged about by the writhing animal guided him now, and reaching the spot he struck the rabbit on the back of the neck with the side of his palm, and it stretched itself out dead.

He was turning away when he saw a woman looking out of the open casement at a window on the ground floor of the adjacent cottage. 'Jude!' said a voice timidly—Sue's voice. 'It is you—is it not?'

'Yes, dear!'

- (25) 'I haven't been able to sleep at all, and then I heard the rabbit, and couldn't help thinking of what it suffered, till I felt I must come down and kill it! But I am so glad you got there first....They ought not to be allowed to set these steel traps, ought they!'

Jude had reached the window, which was quite a low one, so that she was visible down to her waist. She let go of the casement stay and put her hand upon his, her moonlit face regarding him wistfully.

- (30) 'Did it keep you awake?' he said.

'No—I was awake.'

'How was that?'

- (35) 'O, you know—now! I know you, with your religious doctrines, think that a married woman in the trouble of a kind like mine commits a mortal sin in making a man the confidant of it, as I did you. I wish I hadn't, now!' [...].

'I wish you were happy, whatever I may be!'

- (40) 'I *can't* be! So few could enter into my feeling—they would say 'twas my fanciful fastidiousness, or something of that sort, and condemn me....It is none of the natural tragedies of love that's love's usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting!....Jude, before I married him I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me—there was no excuse. I was old enough, and I thought I was very experienced. So I rushed on...with all the cock-sureness of the fool that I was!...I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women; only
- (45) they submit, and I kick....When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what *will* they say!' [...].

Scoring Rubric for Free-Response Question Two: From Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*

- 8-9 These papers feature not only a keen understanding of how the literary elements of the passage reveal the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue, but also a clear perception as to how the author uses literary elements such as diction, choice of detail, symbolism, and tone to reveal it. Well-conceived, well-developed, and well-organized, these papers are marked by frequent and accurate references to the text, by an admirable ability to synthesize thought, and by a mature control over the elements of composition.

- 6-7 These essays exhibit a solid understanding of the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue, but are less adept at showing how the author uses literary elements such as diction, choice of detail, symbolism, and tone to reveal it. This may be due to inconsistencies in textual understanding, to less persuasive and/or less frequent references to the text, and/or to less control over the elements of composition. Though these essays reflect their writers' abilities to convey their points clearly, they feature less fluency, development or cogency than 9-8 papers.

- 5 These papers respond to the question on the passage from *Jude the Obscure* in superficial, formulaic, inconsistent or insufficiently supported ways. They may rely primarily on paraphrase, but may still convey an implicit understanding of the passage and the task. The papers are generally written in a satisfactory manner, with occasional errors in composition or mechanics that do not impede the reader's understanding. Nevertheless, these essays lack the organization, persuasiveness and development of upper-half papers.

- 3-4 These lower-half essays generally suggest an incomplete or overly simplistic understanding of the passage or task, or an inability to comprehend the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue and/or how the author uses literary elements to reveal it. Their arguments are often characterized by a misreading of the text, a failure to provide support from the text, or an insufficient control over the elements of composition. In some instances they may consist entirely of paraphrase and/or feature acute problems in organization, clarity, fluency or development.

- 1-2 These essays compound the shortcomings of 3-4 papers. They often contain many serious and distracting errors in grammar or mechanics that preclude any successful response to the prompt. Though these essays may attempt to show how the author uses literary elements to reveal the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue, they are severely limited by deficiencies in organization, clarity, fluency or development.

- 0 Papers scored a zero make no more than a passing reference to the task.

- Papers given this score offer a blank or totally off-topic response.

Sample Student Essay One

Women's role in society constantly varies from time period to time period and from culture to culture. In some cases, the women lead in the community, while in others they are subjected to subservient and lesser roles. Regardless of their position, however, there has always been a relationship that exists between man and woman. Love is a constant throughout, independent of the marital status that women retain. However, oftentimes the social restrictions of the culture put obstacles in the way of relations between people. Here, the love of Jude and Sue is held captive by the shadow of the women's position in their society. Sue is not allowed to break through the bonds of her marriage, and therefore Jude is not allowed to be with her. Their struggle against the social decorum of the time period is depicted through the symbolism of the rabbit along with the desperate tone of the piece, which is backed by the author's choice of detail.

The symbolism of the rabbit is a key part of the narrative. Its pain and suffering is representative of the trials and tribulations that are brought up in Jude and Sue's predicament. The piece begins at night with Jude's hearing the cry of a trapped rabbit, ensnared by a trapper and left to its agony and suffering until the next morning. At the same time, Jude had been thinking of Sue alone in the house across the way and also trapped, only in her case by an unhappy marriage deemed unbreakable by the social standards of the day. Jude feels the urge to save the rabbit, just as he wishes he could save Sue. He ponders the fate of the rabbit, knowing that if it were a "bad catch" it would suffer far more than if it were a "good catch". Either way, however, its pain would be immense. This exemplifies the pain felt by Sue and the women of other unhappy marriages during the time. Fighting to get away into another life only leads to the anguish that comes from the automatic failure of an uphill battle to escape. Should a "weak-sprung instrument" (being the trap of the rabbit or the broken marriage of the woman) enable one to escape, one is no better off. For the rabbit, the "wound" is too deep and the rabbit surely will die. For Sue, the social impact would be too great and her reputation would be ruined. There is, as proven through the symbolism of the rabbit, often no escape from the binds of cultural decorum.

The story progresses to say that Jude kills the rabbit to put it out of its misery. The only way for the animal to be saved is death as is there no way for the love of Sue and Jude to be preserved in a relationship. Sue comments at the end of the piece that "I daresay it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick". While she knows that fake happiness is forced on other women as well, she sees that they simply give in to the burden and do not fight back. She may "kick," but there is no escaping "what marriage [means]": permanent unity.

The tone of this essay also depicts the burdens placed on Sue and Jude's relationship. Its wistfulness shows the longing of the two lovers and is depicted through the choice of detail the author employs. In the beginning, the author sets the scene by placing Jude in a "lonely room" from which he stares out the window towards Sue's house as it "disappeared behind the night shade." One can imagine the mist rising and the evanescence of the house, its fading fast. Jude watches it vanish, questioning whether or not "his devotional model was all for the best." Why does the author choose to include this detail? It supports the theme by adding a sense of distress and struggle. The house is disappearing quickly, and Jude must be content to watch it go, knowing he can do nothing but see his love fade into the shadows. This detail and imagery supports the idea of the social barrier placed on relationships of the time period, and depicts the power that they have over his life.

A second detail that sets the tone of the narrative is the author's use of time. Jude says that it takes a gruesome total of six hours for the "iron teeth of the trap [to strip] the leg bone [of the rabbit] of its flesh." This graphic piece adds even further to the desperate tone of the story. It shows the epic nature of the struggle to overcome a trap, be it the trap of the hunter or the trap of marriage. Finally, the detail

used in the description of the window from which Sue calls out to Jude also adds to the tone. When Jude walks over to the window, "which is quite a low one, so that [Sue] was visible down to her waist," he is so near to her, and yet the one little wall makes them so far apart. They may be able to get close to each other emotionally, but they will never be able to come together all of the way due to Sue's inability to escape her marriage. Their love is a desperate and wishful situation that is blocked by the barrier of social culture.

By the end of this narrative, one is left with a clear image of the time period and its effect on the lives of Sue and Jude. Neither of them, though so in love, is able to break through the wall of propriety and begin a true relationship together. This feeling of distress and hopelessness is portrayed through the symbolism of the rabbit and the tone set by the choice of detail throughout the piece.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in establishing the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue?

2. What literary elements did the student identify? How well did they relate these to the situations of the two characters?

3. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Sample Student Essay Two

In works of prose, authors use multiple literary tools to convey the same aspect of the plot. As the story line progresses, both Jude and Sue are approached from many different angles in the passage. To convey their natures and predicaments, the author utilizes tone, symbolism, and diction.

In the passage, the tone evolves to convey deeper meaning behind the characters and their situations. The beginning of the passage is dark, confined and lonely. Night isolates Jude from the world around him, hoping to find solace, but instead finding himself restless. This restless tone is conveyed through the rapid, staggered rhetoric. The rabbit's cries are a shrill invasion of the isolation which Jude has forced upon himself. As the passage progresses, this tone evolves and is replaced by a softer attitude. Once the rabbit, a source of anxiety in the beginning of the story, is dead, Jude encounters Sue. The isolation and depressed tone are replaced by touch and intimacy as Sue comes into the story. The change in tone conveys Jude's feelings. Although the dialogue and narration insist on the contrary, the change in tone which Sue's entrance imparts on the story illustrates the love which Jude feels for Sue. In turn, this tone contrasts Jude's determination to maintain the separation from Sue which the darkness and walls of their homes provide.

The rabbit is used as a symbol in the passage to illustrate the conflict which both characters face and the nature in which they deal with these issues. The rabbit's cries of pain arouse both Jude and Sue, who come to its aid. This is similar to Sue and Jude's predicament; Sue, unhappy in her marriage, reached out to Jude for help. This put him in a socially compromising position, since to be the confidant of such information was against the "barbarous customs and superstitions" of the time. In turn, Jude forced himself to separate from Sue, who brought happiness into his life, leaving him painfully isolated. By helping the rabbit, Jude encountered Sue, making it harder to resist and maintain the distance he knew was needed between them. The rabbit, like Sue, was caught in a "steel trap;" Sue's trap was marriage, which society had set down as binding as steel. Jude knew he could not open the trap and let the rabbit go free, as he would have liked; the only solution was to put it out of its misery. Like the rabbit caught in the steel trap, Sue reached out to Jude, but Jude had no way to help her out except to let their relationship die.

Diction plays an enormous role in conveying the meaning behind the passage. In order to draw the parallel between the rabbit and Sue, Sue describes her decision to end her marriage as a "kick" instead of a submission, like most other women, to her unhappiness. This animal-like language draws a connection to the rabbit, as the human-like qualities given to the rabbit connect to Sue. The rabbit is given feeling through the language used to describe its pain; "agonies", "torture", and "mortification". Diction is also used to convey the pain of the separation between Jude and Sue. At the beginning of the passage, Sue is described as sitting "within the walls" of the house. Walls, unlike homes, have no way of escape, and do not provide the freedom of a home. The house disappears in the darkness, leaving the sentiment that it still exists among the darkness behind. The predicament is illuminated using this language.

Although complex, the predicament in the passage is understood through the literary elements used to convey it. Jude, although he understands that he must separate himself from Sue, is not willing to do so, and Sue is not willing to give up on the possibility of living out her life away from the unhappiness of her marriage. The use of tone, symbolism, and diction, all contribute to this understanding.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in establishing the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue?

2. What literary elements did the student identify? How well did they relate these to the situations of the two characters?

3. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Sample Student Essay Three

In an excerpt from Thomas Hardy's book *Jude the Obscure*, the author uses several literary elements to highlight the innocent, kindly nature, and trapped, yet familiar predicament of the protagonist, Jude, and his cousin/sweetheart Sue. These literary elements include the symbolism of the captured rabbit, the repetition of certain meaningful words, and the tone of the piece, which is largely represented through the imprisoning but familiar setting.

The captured rabbit is quite obviously strongly symbolic of both the nature and predicament of Jude and Sue. Both characters are caught in a marital trap as strong, for them, as any rabbit gin of iron teeth. Nothing that they do can free them of the religious bonds of matrimony, just as none of the suffering the rabbit will put itself though can break its trap. But similarly, neither of them can submit to the fate they have been sentenced to. The rabbit will keep struggling until it kills itself, and Jude and Sue will continue to torment themselves with ideas of what could have been and make their married (or separated) lives tortured because of an inability to separate from their past experiences and give in to the present.

The repetition of words offers a similar representation of the situation. Repeating certain words, such as "lonely" and "cry", emphasizes the feelings of the characters. All three characters in the excerpt are alone in their own situation. Jude cannot properly be with Sue, and all that he can do for the rabbit is send it off to another world. Yet no physical barriers separate them. He can still hear the rabbit's cry and feel Sue's loneliness. Therefore, the repetition emphasizes not what is there, but what is missing. The characters can feel one another's pain and try to innocently and openly remedy it, but cannot get past the physical because of the mental barriers in their way.

The tone of Hardy's excerpt is just as depressing as the meaning of the repetition. It is largely represented by the setting; a setting of cold, darkness and confinement. It is ominous, emphasizing the loneliness of the characters, the inefficiency and dimness of the moonlight, and yet the familiarity of the setting and situation. Jude, Sue, and even the rabbit are unfortunate. It is the night after a funeral and by no fault of their own beyond naivete and lack of judgment, they are being besieged with more death and sorrow. But perhaps the most ironic turn of events is that every bit of their predicament is so predictable and familiar, even to them. The entire scene occurs in their home village, surrounding events such as death, rabbit catching, and the church sanctity of divorce (or lack thereof) which had always been stable, unmoving pillars in their lives. The very familiarity of the setting gives the passage a tone of reliability and dependence. This is the way things are, the way life goes. But the night and the loneliness brought in with it bring in the other aspect. Despite the familiarity of their situation, despite the innocence of their original intentions, they are part of a very dire predicament which can never lead to complete happiness as long as they continue to adhere to the religious values with which they were raised from childhood.

Thomas Hardy manages to say a lot in his excerpt from *Jude the Obscure*, using various literary elements such as symbolism, repetition, and tone/setting. He portrays the nature of his main characters, Jude and Sue, as well as the difficulties they face in their feelings for each other, combined with their positions in life. He shows how neither can be happy in their confined positions, but yet none of the past can be changed, just as the rabbit will never be able to escape the iron jaws of its trap unharmed.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in establishing the nature and predicament of both Jude and Sue?

2. What literary elements did the student identify? How well did they relate these to the situations of the two characters?

3. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Author's Response to Sample Student Essays on *Jude the Obscure*

Sample Student Essay One:

While not exemplifying the smoothest writing, this paper responds to the prompt with thoroughness and accuracy. It recognizes the analogous relationship between the rabbit caught in the trap and Sue's entrapment in her loveless marriage. Moreover, it endeavors with some measure of success to connect Sue's plight to the position of all women in that time period, perceptively alluding to "social restrictions" and "the binds of cultural decorum." It notices the bleak irony shared by women and the rabbit, how "Fighting to get away into another life only leads to the anguish that comes from the automatic failure of an uphill battle to escape." It somewhat surprisingly focuses on the widow's house being obscured by nightfall, noting how "Jude must be content to watch it go, knowing he can do nothing but see his love fade into the shadows." It also does something unique in its focus on the long time that the rabbit has to endure its agony, claiming that "It shows the epic nature of the struggle to overcome a trap, be it the trap of the hunter or the trap of marriage." The writer further notices the irony of Jude's proximity to Sue, how though separated only by a low wall, "Their love is a desperate and wishful situation that is blocked by the barrier of social culture." Though tainted in spots by rough syntax, this is a case where one must reward the writer for what he or she did well, which was substantial

Author's Score: 8

Sample Student Essay Two:

The second student sample is a bit problematic. The writer of this essay is not without insight. The student perceives the connection between Sue and the trapped rabbit, makes some accurate observations about the "dark, confined, and lonely" tone of the passage, recognizes Jude's impotence in terms of being able to effect any change in Sue's marriage, and uses the passage's diction to further cement the connection between Sue and the entrapped hare. At the same time, the essay's introductory paragraph does not provide clear direction, the organization of the essay seems rather random, and the syntax (e.g., "Night isolates Jude from the world around him, hoping to find solace, but instead finding himself restless.") suffers occasional lapses. In this case, though the thought propels this into the upper-half, the compositional shortcomings deter it from rising very far in it.

Author's Score: 6

Sample Student Essay Three:

The third student essay also is a bit inconsistent. Its opening paragraph, which offers the carefully laid out trinity of "the symbolism of the captured rabbit, the repetition of certain meaningful words, and the tone of the piece [. . .]", also is a bit muddled by cumbersome phrases such as "the imprisoning but familiar setting." A sentence such as "Nothing that they do can free them of the religious bonds of matrimony, just as none of the suffering the rabbit will put itself though can break its trap," makes it seem that the student thinks Jude and Sue are married. This confusion is further abetted by sentences such as "The rabbit will keep struggling until it kills itself, and Jude and Sue will continue to torment themselves with ideas of what could have been and make their married (or separated) lives tortured because of an inability to separate from their past experiences and give in to the present." The writer scores some points with his discussion of diction, but is clearly off-target in his claim that "no physical barriers separate them." Though the discussion of tone and setting at first seems promising, muddled sentences, such as

"The entire scene occurs in their home village, surrounding events such as death, rabbit catching, and the church sanctity of divorce (or lack thereof) which had always been stable, unmoving pillars in their lives," hinder comprehension of the writer's point. Though having too much analysis for it to be sentenced to the lower half, the failure to maintain a clear, fluent argument keeps this from being promoted into the upper one.

Author's Score: 5

Explication of Free-Response Question Three: An Estranged Character

The final free-response task in Sample Examination One asked students to select a character who “gradually becomes estranged from society due to some aspect of his/her nature or convictions, an estrangement that may have damaging consequences either for the individual or for the society itself.” After identifying such a character, students were asked to write an essay in which they “indicate[d] the impetus behind the estrangement and the damaging effects this alienation [had] upon the individual or the society around him.”

Finding a character who is estranged should not have proved too difficult for students since the causes of estrangement—race, creed, gender, political belief or action, sexual orientation, physical appearance, to name a few—provide a wide range of possibilities. For example, students could delve into Greek tragedy to show how Medea—brought to Greece from her homeland by Jason who, having fathered two children with her, abandons her to marry the king’s daughter—feels isolated and alone; or how Antigone’s bold decision to defy Creon’s edict and bury her brother Polynices makes her, by the king’s decree, an enemy of the state. Or students might look at how physically deformed characters such as Pomerantz’s “elephant man,” Rostand’s Cyrano, and Flannery O’Connor’s grotesque Hazel Motes are ostracized by the community around them. The strong feminine convictions of Chopin’s Edna Pontellier or Ibsen’s Nora and Hedda Gabler; the political stance of Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*, or the religious conviction (albeit an unsteady one) of the whisky priest in *The Power & the Glory*; even Bartleby’s exasperating “I prefer not to” provide excellent examples of texts and characters that would answer the question successfully.

As to the damaging effects this estrangement has upon the individual and/or the society around him, in some cases the individual is killed or elects suicide, in others he is confined to a prison or sanatorium. In more positive instances, such as in *On the Road* or *The Scarlet Letter*, the individuals blissfully revel in their estrangement or, by their good works, are gradually accepted back into society, though these seem to be exceptional cases. My expectation is that students should enjoy this question and have little difficulty finding an appropriate work with which to respond to it.

This question has been reprinted for your convenience.

Question Three

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Oftentimes in literature a character gradually becomes estranged from society due to some aspect of his/her nature or convictions, an estrangement that may have damaging consequences either for the individual or for the society itself. Choose a novel or play which features a character who has become estranged from the society in which he/she exists. Then in a well-organized essay, indicate the impetus behind the estrangement and the damaging effects this alienation has upon the individual or the society around him/her. You may choose from the list below or use another novel or play of recognized literary merit.

The Catcher in the Rye

Medea

The Scarlet Letter

Jude the Obscure

The Stranger

The Elephant Man

On the Road

Stranger in a Strange Land

Wise Blood

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

The Awakening

Winesburg, Ohio

The Metamorphosis

The Power and the Glory

A Man For All Seasons

Invisible Man

The Hairy Ape

Oliver Twist

Hedda Gabler

Down These Mean Streets

Hamlet

Bartleby the Scrivener

Ethan Frome

Scoring Rubric for Free-Response Question Three: An Estranged Character

- 8-9 These papers select an appropriately estranged character, provide clear reason(s) for his/her estrangement, and illustrate the effects that this isolation has upon the character and/or the society around him/her. Well-conceived, well-developed, and well-organized, these papers are marked by frequent and accurate references to the text, by an admirable ability to synthesize thought, and by a mature control over the elements of composition. Though not perfect, they clearly indicate the students' ability to respond to the prompt with fluency and cogency.
- 6-7 These essays select an appropriately estranged character, but are less adept at identifying the reasons for the estrangement or at showing how this isolation negatively impacts the character and/or the society around him/her. These papers may make less persuasive or less frequent references to the text, and/or illustrate less control over the elements of composition. Though these essays reflect their writers' abilities to convey their points clearly, they feature less fluency, development or cogency than 9-8 papers.
- 5 These papers respond to the question about an estranged character in superficial, formulaic, inconsistent or insufficiently supported ways. They may rely primarily on paraphrase, but may still convey an implicit understanding of the task. The papers are generally written in a satisfactory manner, with occasional errors in composition or mechanics that do not impede the reader's understanding. Nevertheless, these essays lack the organization, persuasiveness and development of upper-half papers.
- 3-4 These lower-half essays generally suggest an incomplete or overly simplistic understanding of the work or task, fail to provide convincing reasons for the estrangement, or fail to show how this isolation negatively impacts the character and/or the society around him/her. Their arguments are often characterized by a failure to provide support from the text, or an insufficient control over the elements of composition. In some instances they may consist entirely of paraphrase and/or feature acute problems in organization, clarity, fluency or development.
- 1-2 These essays compound the shortcomings of 3-4 papers. They often contain many serious and distracting errors in grammar or mechanics that preclude any successful response to the prompt. Though these essays may identify an estranged character, they are severely limited by deficiencies in organization, clarity, fluency or development.
- 0 Papers scored a zero make no more than a passing reference to the task.
- Papers given this score offer a blank or totally off-topic response.

Sample Student Essay One

The human is a very social being. He desires to surround himself with others, thus making isolation a very severe punishment. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne is subject to this sentence after having a child with a man other than her husband. Immediately following the placement of a scarlet "A" on her chest, Hester becomes estranged from society and must be as self-sufficient as possible so she can survive. What becomes clear is the fact that isolation makes people yearn for company, as Hester does for Arthur Dimmesdale, the father of her child. However, her estrangement eventually destroys the souls of both her child and Dimmesdale, leaving Hester completely desolate.

Hester becomes isolated after a scarlet letter is placed on her chest due to her adultery with another man. Hester is married to Roger Chillingworth, but they part for a few years as he travels and learns, planning to meet when this journey is complete. In this time, however, Hester falls in love with Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and gives birth to a child soon after. When the public discovers this, she is punished by being forced to stand on a scaffold and drown in her own shame. Hester stands alone, holding her child, Pearl, for the Reverend is unable to confess with her at this time. By forcing her to wear the letter "A" for her crime of adultery, the society makes it obvious to any outsider that she has committed this crime, making the townspeople quick to mock her and ostracize her from society. On one particular occasion, young children find it appropriate to throw mud at the daughter, Pearl, and whisper about her and her mother. While it is Hester's choice to live on the outskirts of town after becoming an outcast, the public has almost rendered this necessary because the torment Hester would be forced to handle by living in town each day would be unbearable.

Hester's life changes drastically when she is estranged for she must use her independence and personal strength to survive even as she is losing everyone she loves. Hester supports herself by selling work she sews to the townspeople, but they by no means accept her because of this. Though this talent is usually respectable, Hester is still looked down upon and excluded even in her efforts to help the poor. This makes Hester desperate for affection, and although she does her best to support herself and raise her child, neither she nor Dimmesdale can live without each other completely. To satisfy this desire, Hester meets secretly with Dimmesdale in the woods at night. She is willing to risk the exposure of her secret to be with the person she loves, showing that no person can happily live alone but must find some way to be with others or fall apart. In Hester's case, however, Dimmesdale and Pearl internally deteriorate, leaving her unable to find affection.

Ironically, Dimmesdale becomes estranged as well despite his inability to admit to his crime. Although society does not know the truth and has yet to force him into isolation, he becomes so depressed that he physically deteriorates and is engrossed in his shame. He and Hester show a desire to reunite and break the isolation by planning an escape, but Dimmesdale has become so lonely from her absence that this becomes impossible. He finally realizes that he must be with her completely and admit his wrongdoing to the public, but by the time he confesses, his health has become so poor that he passes away.

While Hester's isolation is destroying Dimmesdale, it is also taking hold of Pearl with its incredible hands. Pearl is unable to communicate with other children and is therefore missing necessary social skills. Having no one her own age to play with, Pearl creates friends in her mind and focuses the rest of her energy on the one thing that sparks her attention: the scarlet letter on her mother's chest. Pearl begins to absorb its evil and to remind Hester daily that it represents her crime. Because of this, Hester becomes very distant from Pearl and at times thinks of her as maligned. Just like Hester, Pearl simply longs for love but the estrangement does not allow this, so her heart dies along with Hester's.

With estrangement comes a series of problems, including a longing for love that is not fulfilled. Hester's wrongdoings force her into isolation and make her stronger for a short while, but as her estrangement from society negatively affects both Dimmesdale and Pearl, she soon loses the two people that she loves and becomes even more isolated than at the start of the novel. Perhaps the human is too reliant on the warmth of others to save herself when others are absent, which brings a quick demise when others are gone.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in identifying an estranged character and providing reason(s) for the character's estrangement?

2. How successfully did the student illustrate the damaging effects of the estrangement upon the individual or upon his/her society?

2. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Sample Student Essay Two

Offred, the protagonist of Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, goes through a complete estrangement from what is considered proper society when her secular country turns into the strictly Christianized Republic of Gilead. The events surrounding this impetus, its direct effects on her, and the resulting mental damage suffered by Offred illustrate the harm a separation from society can cause, even if it is the society that is at fault for the incident.

The Republic of Gilead is formed through a complete change of societal values. Secularism is exchanged for religious extremism as women are returned to their primeval roles as mothers and housekeepers, and men to their positions of landlords and rulers, as well as strict guardsmen of biblical morality. As a wife to a man in his second marriage, this vault completely confounds Offred's original lifestyle. By no fault of her own beyond her gender and position in life, Offred is separated from her husband and daughter (as second marriages become illegitimatized), loses all her political rights, and is forced into the role of a walking uterus, or handmaid, for old and most often sterile married men. No longer allowed to read, write, or even talk without permission, Offred must find a way to meet her new surroundings.

When her life started Offred was a responsible, fun-loving woman. She worked, took care of her husband and daughter, and relaxed with her friends. She worried over little things, but was for the most part fairly content with her position in life. After the political upheaval and her acclimation to her new roles, Offred herself does not change. She has all of the same memories and potential. However, in reaction to her surroundings, aspects of her personality become more pointed. Her love of companionship turns into an intense loneliness as she craves the company she now lacks. Without friends or family Offred becomes more introspective and learns to focus on the happy past as opposed to the dismal present and even worse future. And as a result of this lack of camaraderie and bleak future, Offred becomes incredibly desperate for anything that will spice up her life. She takes risks, ranging from sexual encounters to forbidden conversations to underground parties, all for the sake of something to do and some vent for her pent-up emotions.

Unfortunately, such actions can be very dangerous in an authoritarian society. Any misstep holds grave potentials for Offred to be caught by immorality squadrons and sent off for torture or forced labor among nuclear waste, both of which result in an almost guaranteed death. And, of course, there is that misstep. A smudge of lipstick indicating her presence in a place she should not have visited leads to a van to take her away. Due to underground connections Offred is actually not immediately placed in captivity and may have actually escaped altogether, but nothing can change the effects of her experiences on herself. The intense boredom and longing for freedom can be heard in every paragraph of her narrative, as well as the yearning for the child and husband she had to leave behind. Whether Offred made it to freedom or not, her inability to fit into her new society caused her intense pain and grievances.

Offred, of A Handmaid's Tale, did not choose her society. It chose her to endure dictates which she could not believe in. And because of this separation from society, because Offred could not adapt to the ways of the Republic of Gilead, she suffered mental harm that no time could take away. She may have even been killed.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in identifying an estranged character and providing reason(s) for the character's estrangement?

2. How successfully did the student illustrate the damaging effects of the estrangement upon the individual or upon his/her society?

2. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Sample Student Essay Three

The 1920s were a time of prosperity and of generally good humor; it was the age of flappers and jazz, in which almost everyone was partying. The "Lost Generation," disliking the actions of those around them, was a group of writers and poets, many of whom have written works of great caliber. One of the members of the small society was Ernest Hemingway, whose book *The Sun Also Rises* actually depicts the life of a member of society who does not fit in. Jake Barnes was a soldier in World War I who is now searching for his place in life, but despite his efforts, remains quite detached from the society around him.

Jake Barnes is excluded from the fun-loving society around him by his inescapable past and experiences. The efforts of World War I have maimed him not only physically, but have mentally separated him from the people around him. He feels that there is so much more to life now (aside from the silly chatter that people entertain themselves with) due to the things he has seen. Being in the war gave him the opportunity to see many horrific things that have changed his views of life significantly. Incapable of finding a place for himself in the United States when the war ended, the story begins with Jake living in Paris with several shallow friends and a former nurse with whom he was romantically involved during the War. Though he has friends now, he has a vast aperture to fill in his life due to what he has seen, and attempts to use alcohol to buffer the pain. Ironically, this only makes it worse for himself, and it is very often that Jake ends a day by crying himself to sleep. There doesn't seem to be anyone in the world that he can relate to, even the people who have been through it with him, because just as he tries to keep his sorrow hidden, so do those around him. There seems to be no escaping this consuming truth, that the war has permanently separated him from the rest of the world. All around him the world has remained the same jovial place, but within him a greater truth has been found about the nature of life and death. This knowledge has permanently separated Jake Barnes from the average society of the 1920s.

Due to physical injuries, Jake has also been separated not only from the society around him, but even from his intimate circle of friends. One of these friends was Lady Brett Ashley, who served as a nurse during the war. Her and Jake live a close life, and are often romantically involved with each other. However, Jake's infertility, caused by the war, will always keep her just out of reach. This is because she desires men in a more sexual than emotional way, because she feels that she cannot fill her life any other way. She uses sex and alcohol to take the edge off of life, hoping that eventually she can fill the emptiness that she herself feels. However, all of her affairs and second marriages cannot help her forget the fact that she loves Jake, and that he loves her to extreme ends. The two endlessly tell each other this truth, but will never truly be together because, though they share similar wounds, they are incurable by contact with their own kind. However, due to them, they are incapable of normal social interaction. Therefore, it would seem that they are stuck in a proverbial trench within themselves, battling to discover who out there is hiding truth with superficial prattle, and who truly has no knowledge to hide.

Jake continues to yearn for Brett throughout the novel, but receives no real confirmation of a relationship. Due to his injuries, they cannot have sex, something which is very important to Brett. And due to her fleeting personality, and her knack for travel, there is no possibility of a true romance. Kissing is as far as the couple can truly go—unsatisfying and passionate kissing that makes Jake mourn. The problem is that Jake has been separated from his world in more than just a mental way. He has been separated because of his wounds, and because of how they have impacted his romantic life.

Summarily, Jake Barnes is a desperate character in American literature. The horrors of war have forever detached him from the society that he wishes to be accepted in. There is no way for him to enjoy the "Roaring '20s," because he knows exactly what led to the gaiety of those around him: the death of many he cared for, and the injury of his very psyche. War has permanently corrupted his view of the world around him, and Jake is tied inexorably to the world in which he lives.

You Rate It!

1. How thorough a job did the student do in identifying an estranged character and providing reason(s) for the character's estrangement?

2. How successfully did the student illustrate the damaging effects of the estrangement upon the individual or upon his/her society?

2. How well-organized and fluent was the student's paper? Was the student's overall argument a persuasive one?

4. On a 0-9 scale, how would you rate this response? Explain why.

Author's Response to Sample Student Essays on An Estranged Character

Sample Student Essay One:

This competent and well-developed response chooses an appropriate character—Hester Prynne from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*—with which to respond to the prompt. The writer clearly identifies the reason for Hester's estrangement (adultery) and the immediate price she pays for it (ignominious exhibition on the scaffold, the stigma of the scarlet A, and ostracism from the Puritan community). Moreover, the writer pursues the effect of Hester's ostracism on the characters most dear to her, her lover Dimmesdale and her daughter Pearl, showing how the burden of his inability to confess mentally destroys the former, and how the taunts and meanness of the children in the community depress the latter. The author also examines Hester's acute loneliness, suggesting that "She is willing to risk the exposure of her secret to be with the person she loves [because] no person can happily live alone but must find some way to be with others or fall apart." The student's observation that, "Perhaps the human is too reliant on the warmth of others to save herself when others are absent, which brings a quick demise when others are gone," offers a sapient closing aphorism. While this essay lacks the compositional élan of the finest papers, it does an extremely thorough job of addressing all aspects of the question and is appropriately rewarded for doing so.

Author's Score: 8

Sample Student Essay Two:

The second sample essay also chooses an appropriate novel with which to answer the question—*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. It notes key differences in that Offred, the novel's protagonist, is more victim than transgressor and that her ostracism is a result of political circumstances (in this case, a fictional takeover by religious conservatives who perceive women's primary role as childbearing). The writer tidily sums up the consequences of Offred's estrangement in the sentence "By no fault of her own beyond her gender and position in life, Offred is separated from her husband and daughter (as second marriages become illegitimized), loses all her political rights, and is forced into the role of a walking uterus, or handmaid, for old and most often sterile married men." The student suggests the impact such isolation has upon Offred's nature when she observes how "as a result of this lack of camaraderie and bleak future Offred becomes incredibly desperate for anything that will spice up her life. She takes risks, ranging from sexual encounters to forbidden conversations to underground parties, all for the sake of something to do and some vent for her pent up emotions." The writer further observes that through these dangerous actions, Offred exposes herself to punishment, noting that "Any misstep holds grave potentials for Offred to be caught by immorality squadrons and sent off for torture or forced labor among nuclear waste, both of which result in an almost guaranteed death." This paper also responds well to the assigned task, though it on occasion too readily assumes that the reader is intimately familiar with the novel's plot and has occasional lapses in diction and phrasing ("vault;" "pointed;" "Offred must find a way to meet her new surroundings").

Author's Score: 7

Sample Student Essay Three:

The third sample essay also chooses a highly appropriate character—Jake Barnes of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Though this essay takes awhile to get started (we are three paragraphs

in before we learn that Jake's wartime injuries have left him impotent), it ultimately gets the job done as well, showing how Jake's infertility estranges him from the woman he loves (Brett Ashley) and from love itself. The writer also hints at the fact that Brett has her own emotional void and sagely observes how "The two endlessly tell each other this truth, but will never truly be together because, though they share similar wounds, they are incurable by contact with their own kind." Unlike the novels discussed in the previous two essays, the estrangement here is physical on two levels: the expatriate scene of post-World War I Paris, and Jake's inability to engage in sexual relations. Even so, the greater estrangement in Hemingway's novel is emotional since characters such as Jake, Brett and others that the writer does not mention cannot seem to connect to others in anything but the most meaningless ways. The student writer uses a wonderfully insightful turn-of-phrase when she writes "they are stuck in a proverbial trench within themselves, battling to discover who out there is hiding truth with superficial prattle, and who truly has no knowledge to hide." Though this essay has some moments of awkward syntax, it nevertheless remains a strong, upper-half paper.

Author's Score: 7