

Modifying  
AP Exam Questions  
to  
Increase Rigor  
in a  
Middle School Classroom

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## Ready for the AP Exam in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade?

Ayn Grubb

A few years ago, a suburb of my hometown advertised that they send eighty per cent of their high school graduates to college. On the billboard, the number 80 was large and bold, larger even than the name of the town—let’s call it Springfield. The colors were bright and full of contrast, appearing as they did on the highway that leads to and is named for one of the other suburbs—let’s call it Fairview. This billboard, shameless siren to the Fairview commuters on their long ride home, hinted at a better life. “Move to Springfield,” was its barely hidden message. “Your children will surely be successful there.”

I was tempted to gather some of my fellow teachers and rent the next billboard on the Fairview Expressway. I wanted to ask: how many of those 80% earn degrees? For too long, many people have seen college as a goal in itself. Just getting there is enough, they think. The message on this billboard attempted to take advantage of that fallacious reasoning.

The truth is that we must help our high school students do more than matriculate. We must help them develop skills to ensure their success in college classrooms. Those who do not plan to go to college need to develop skills to make them more productive and more fulfilled. The sooner they start to develop these skills, the better. The more fully developed these skills become, the more prepared our students will be for whatever challenges lie before them.

I routinely look to the AP Literature and Language Exams as a sort of a guide for what skills I should emphasize in my 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. Though my students know that the AP class is a possibility for them in the distant future, I definitely do not expect them to start worrying about it now. Many of my students will not even take the AP exam, and I certainly will not be asking them to take practice exams in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. However, the skills students need to be successful on the AP Language or Literature Exam are the same skills that will prepare them for all kinds of other challenges, so I find that it is a very good place to start.

Question 2 of the 2001 literature exam asks students to read a passage from *Tom Jones* and “analyze the techniques Fielding employs...to characterize Mr. Allworthy and Mrs. Deborah Wilkins.” To do well on this question, students must be close readers, able to analyze an author’s use of imagery, detail, and diction. Students must be familiar with comparing and contrasting. They must have very good writing skills and be able to use evidence to present a solid argument.

That evidence must be correctly referenced and attributed to the original text, and students who are unfamiliar with anything but contemporary fiction will have difficulty just reading this particular text.

Shouldn't we be asking our middle school students to practice close reading, analyzing a piece of fiction for such elements as imagery, detail, and diction? On my own vertical team, the writing focus for 8<sup>th</sup> graders is on argumentation, how to use evidence to present a solid case, so this AP Exam question is not so far removed from what I would want to bring to my 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. I could ask my students to perform similar tasks with easier pieces of fiction or I could create easier tasks to help them decipher the more difficult texts.

It is probably not surprising to find that another question from the same literature exam (Question 1, 2001) requires many of the same skills of students. This question asks them to read two poems, one from Wordsworth and one from Dunbar. Students must “compare and contrast the two poems and analyze the relationship between them.” All of the same skills are being tested here—the ability to close read, compare/contrast, and find evidence. Again, students who have not read literature—especially poetry—from other time periods will be at a disadvantage.

Looking at these two questions together reminds me that I should expose my students to more passages and poems from other time periods, to texts that will be difficult for them to read and understand. I wouldn't ask them to read the entire novel, of course, but I wouldn't mind devoting an entire class period to a passage from *Pride and Prejudice* or a bit of an Eliot poem. We might do no more than understand what happens in each passage, but that would be enough. As they experience success with texts they deem “impossible,” they will grow more confident, more willing to take on other challenges.

What might surprise some teachers is that a similar study of the language questions yields a similar result. Question 2 of the 2000 language exam, the Gandhi/Orwell question, asks students to “note [the author's] choice of details and his tone.” This passage proved to be extremely difficult. Some students had difficulty simply keeping Orwell's and Gandhi's arguments separate, but the prompt asks them to “assess how effectively Orwell develops his own position.” Again, students must be able to compare and contrast and make sense of a difficult text. The only difference here is the fact that students have to assess another's argument even as they are making their own.

Question 3 of the 2001 language exam uses the words “support, refute, or qualify,” but the task for students is essentially the same. They must make sense of a difficult text, analyze the argument,

then gather evidence to defend their own arguments. They must write “well-focused, persuasive essays”, making “apt and specific references to the passage” and display “effective control of language.”

So these AP Exam questions seem to ask many of the same things of students. They must close read and analyze passages—whether fiction or non-fiction, poetry or prose. They must analyze arguments and form their own. They must write well-focused essays with references to the text. Which of these skills would we not expect of an 8<sup>th</sup> grader?

No matter what classes or tests they do take in the four years after they leave my classroom, the skills students must master in order to do well on the AP Exam are skills that will serve them well in lots of other challenging courses, not just in an AP class. More importantly, these same skills will help them to become more engaged members of their communities. A person who was able to assess the effectiveness of an argument in high school is a person who is better prepared to, say, sort through editorials in the newspaper, analyze the arguments presented there, and make an informed decision for herself.

The skills our students need for this exam are skills that will help them to do well in any challenging course. The skills are not relegated to an elite, select few in an AP class, but they are things that we would want all of our students to know, things that we could start teaching in middle school or earlier. They are skills we want all of our students to acquire even if they do not plan to go to college. These skills will help them to do well and stay in college if they do go. A student who has—over the course of his K-12 career—developed the skills we listed above will be more confident and better able to accomplish any tasks set before him.

**ACTIVITY:** Choose any free response question from a past AP Literature or Language Exam and rewrite it for middle school students. You might choose a difficult passage and ask students to do a simpler task, or you could choose a question with simple reading and ask students to do a more complicated bit of analysis with it.

**EXAMPLES:**

Use the Orwell/Gandhi question and ask students to do no more than explain the two separate arguments, Orwell’s and Gandhi’s.

In a difficult literary passage, ask students to act out the scene.

Use the short story “Eleven” (which was on the 1995 literature exam) and ask students to discuss how the author’s choice of imagery contributes to a characterization of Rachael.

Ask students to read the Audubon/Dillard passages from the 2003 Language Exam and highlight the details each author chooses to describe the flocks of birds.

## 2003 Literature and Composition Question 3—Tragic Hero

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

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

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

You may choose a work from the list below or another novel or play of comparable quality. Avoid mere plot summary.

<i>An American Tragedy</i>	<i>Light in August</i>
<i>Anna Karenina</i>	<i>Long Day's Journey into Night</i>
<i>Anti gone</i>	<i>Lord Jim</i>
<i>Beloved</i>	<i>Macbeth</i>
<i>Crime and Punishment</i>	<i>Medea</i>
<i>Death of a Salesman</i>	<i>Moby Dick</i>
<i>Ethan Frome</i>	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>
<i>Faust</i>	<i>Phèdre</i>
<i>Fences</i>	<i>Ragtime</i>
<i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>	<i>Sent for You Yesterday</i>
<i>Frankenstein</i>	<i>Tess of the D 'Urbervilles</i>
<i>Hedda Gabler</i>	<i>Things Fall Apart</i>
<i>King Lear</i>	

## 2001 Literature and Composition Question 1—Milton/Douglass

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

In each of the following poems, the speaker responds to the conditions of a particular place and time—England in 1802 in the first poem, the United States about 100 years later in the second. Read each poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast the two poems and analyze the relationship between them.

London, 1802

Milton!<sup>1</sup> thou shouldst be living at this hour:  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen<sup>2</sup>  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hail and bower,  
5 Have forfeited their ancient English dower<sup>3</sup>  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;  
10 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

<sup>1</sup> John Milton (1608-3674). English poet and political writer, author of *Paradise Lost*, whose famous essay against censorship, *Areopagitica*, championed the cause of liberty and public virtue.

<sup>2</sup> Swamp

<sup>3</sup> Natural endowment

Douglass\*

Ah, Douglass, we have fall'n on evil days,  
Such days as thou, not even thou didst know,  
When thee, the eyes of that harsh long ago  
Saw, salient, at the cross of devious ways,  
And all the country heard thee with amaze.  
Not ended then, the passionate ebb and flow,  
The awful tide that battled to and fro;  
We ride amid a tempest of dispraise.  
  
Now, when the waves of swift dissension swarm,  
And Honor, the strong pilot, lieth stark,  
Oh for thy voice high-sounding o'er the storm,  
For thy strong arm to guide the shivering bark,  
The blast-defying power of thy form,  
To give us comfort through the lonely dark.

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

\*Frederick Douglass (1817-3895), American writer, former slave, whose autobiography (1845) made him a leader in the abolitionist cause

## 2001 Literature and Composition

### Question 2—from *Tom Jones*

The passage below is taken from the novel *Tom Jones* (1749) by the English novelist and playwright Henry Fielding. In this scene, which occurs early in the novel, Squire Allworthy discovers an infant in his bed. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the techniques that Fielding employs in this scene to characterize Mr. Allworthy and Mrs. Deborah Wilkins.

1 Mr. Allworthy came to his house very late in the evening, and after a short supper with his sister, retired much fatigued to his chamber. Here, having spent some minutes on his knees—a custom which he never broke  
5 through on any account—he was preparing to step into bed, when, upon opening the clothes, to his great surprise he beheld an infant, wrapt up in some coarse linen, in a sweet and profound sleep, between his sheets. He stood some time lost in astonishment at this sight;  
10 but, as good-nature had always the ascendant in his mind, he soon began to be touched with sentiments of compassion for the little wretch before him. He then rang his bell, and ordered an elderly woman-servant to rise immediately, and come to him; and in the mean time  
15 was so eager in contemplating the beauty of innocence, appearing in those lively colours with which infancy and sleep always display it, that his thoughts were too much engaged to reflect that he was in his shirt when the matron came in. She had, indeed, given her master  
20 sufficient time to dress himself; for out of respect to him, and regard to decency, she had spent many minutes in adjusting her hair at the looking-glass, notwithstanding all the hurry in which she had been summoned by the servant, and though her master, for aught she knew, lay  
25 expiring in an apoplexy, or in some other fit.

It will not be wondered at that a creature who had so strict a regard to decency in her own person should be shocked at the least deviation from it in another. She therefore no sooner opened the door, and saw her  
30 master standing by the bedside in his shirt, with a candle in his hand, than she started back in a most terrible fright, and might perhaps have swooned away, had he not now recollected his being undressed, and put an end to her terrors by desiring her to stay without the door till  
35 he had thrown some clothes over his back, and was become incapable of shocking the pure eyes of Mrs. Deborah Wilkins, who, though in the fifty-second year of her age, vowed she had never beheld a man without  
40 his coat...

When Mrs. Deborah returned into the room, and was acquainted by her master with the finding of the little infant, her consternation was rather greater than his had

been; nor could she refrain from crying out, with great horror of accent as well as look, "My good sir! what's to be done?" Mr. Allworthy answered, she  
45 must take care of the child that evening, and in the morning he would give orders to provide it a nurse. "Yes, sir," says she; "and I hope your worship will send out your warrant to take up the hussy its  
50 mother, for she must be one of the neighbourhood; and I should be glad to see her committed to Bridewell, and whipt at the cart's tail but for my own part, it goes against me to touch these misbegotten  
55 wretches, whom I don't look upon as my fellow-creature. Faugh! how it stinks! If I might be so bold to give my advice, I would have it put in a basket, and sent out and laid at the churchwarden's door. It is a good night, only a little rainy and windy; and if it was well wrapt up, and put in a warm  
60 basket, it is two to one but it lives till it is found in the morning. But if it should not, we have discharged our duty in taking proper care of it; and it is, perhaps, better for such creatures to die in a state of innocence, than to grow up and imitate their  
65 mothers; for nothing better can be expected of them."

There were some strokes in this speech which, perhaps, would have offended Mr. Allworthy had he strictly attended to it; but he had now got one of his  
70 fingers into the infant's hand, which, by its gentle pressure, seeming to implore his assistance, had certainly outpleaded the eloquence of Mrs. Deborah, had it been ten times greater than it was. He now gave Mrs. Deborah positive orders to take the child  
75 to her own bed, and to call up a maid-servant to provide it pap, and other things, against it waked. Such was the discernment of Mrs. Wilkins, and such the respect she bore her master, under whom she enjoyed a most excellent place, that her scruples  
80 gave way to his peremptory commands; and she took the child under her arms, without any apparent disgust at the illegality of its birth; and declaring it

was a sweet little infant, walked off with it to her own chamber.

### **SOME MODIFICATION IDEAS**

#### **for 2003, question 3 (tragic hero)**

1. Ask students to answer the same prompt, but give them one piece of literature to choose from, the same piece the whole class just read together.
2. Put students into small groups to accomplish number one above.
3. Expose students to more bits of literary criticism.
4. Discuss the Frye quote as a large group before asking students to write anything.
5. Discuss the lit. criticism without asking students to write an actual essay in response.
6. After a large group discussion, ask students to write a paragraph in response or ask them to list only the evidence they would use to back up a particular claim.

### **SOME MODIFICATION IDEAS**

#### **for 2001, question 1 (Milton/Douglass)**

ideas originally gathered by Norma Wilkerson and Debbie McIntyre

1. Use the following framework to help students write a compare/ contrast statement using elements from the poem:  
Comparing \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
shows \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_
2. Write the poem as a paragraph and give to students. Ask them to put it into sonnet form.
3. Ask your students, "Who was Milton? Who was Douglass?" Give them time in the library or on the internet to discover the answers. They could present their information to the class.
4. Get students used to all kinds of comparison/ contrast.

## SOME MODIFICATION IDEAS

### for 2001, question 2 (from *Tom Jones*)

ideas originally gathered by Norma Wilkerson and Debbie McIntyre

1. Have students act out the scene between Mr. Allworthy and Mrs. Wilkins.
2. Have students write a biopoem for one or both of the characters.
3. Have students write a found poem, using words and phrases from the passage.
4. Reduce the size of the passage, looking at one character at a time. Give the shorter version to students who can then write a characterization.
5. Use the following table to help students gather as much information from the passage as possible:

<u>inference</u>	<u>evidence</u>	<u>commentary</u>
Allworthy is a religious man.	quote from passage	What does it matter? Fit into big picture.

6. Expose students to more pre-19C. literature.
7. Practice close reading. Annotate the passage together. Use an overhead transparency while students work with their own copies, using highlighters to mark evidence and pens to write commentary in the margins.  
possible motifs to examine: appearance vs. reality  
decorum vs. compassion
8. Ask students to rewrite the passage from different POV's:  
Mrs. Wilkins, Mr. Allworthy, the baby, an innocent bystander or a fly on the wall
9. Ask students to mimic the passage.
10. Show more examples of humor, irony, satire.
11. Develop a vocabulary exercise, or have students create the vocabulary list themselves, using the archaic words in the passage.
12. Ask students to paraphrase the passage.
13. Ask students to write Mrs. Wilkins's subtext. Though she says one thing, she might mean or be trying to accomplish something quite different.  
What's her real agenda behind her words?

# Now, modify your own.

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## 3 ways to modify:

### **1. Use the same piece, but assign a different task.**

If the piece is accessible, have students read it and complete only part of the original task...or... give them a completely different analysis to perform on the same piece.

### **2. Use a different piece, and assign the same task.**

If the piece is too difficult, choose a more appropriate reading and have students perform the same analysis that's explained in the prompt...or... give them a part of the original task.

### **3. Do something completely different.**

Assign a completely different, hands-on assignment, something that will help students perform or prepare to perform a kind of analysis.

## 2003 Literature and Composition Question 2—from “The Other Paris”

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

The following passage is an excerpt from "The Other Paris," a short story by the Canadian writer Mavis Gallant. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, explain how the author uses narrative voice and characterization to provide social commentary.

If anyone had asked Carol at what precise moment she fell in love, or where Howard Mitchell proposed to her, she would have imagined, quite sincerely, a scene that involved all at once the Seine, moonlight, barrows of violets, acacias in flower, and a confused, crooked streets. This was what everyone expected, and she had nearly come to believe it herself. Actually, he had proposed at lunch, over a tuna-fish salad. He and Carol had known each other less than three weeks, and their conversation, until then, had been limited to their office—an American government agency—and the people in it. Carol was twenty-two no one had proposed to her before, except an unsuitable medical student with no money and eight years' training still to go. She was under the illusion that in a short time she would be so old no one would celebrate by ordering an extra bottle of wine. Both would have liked champagne, as a more emphatic symbol of the unusual, but each was too diffident to ask her again. She accepted at once, and Howard suggest it.

The fact that Carol was not in love with Howard Mitchell did not dismay her in the least. From a series of helpful college lectures on marriage she had learned that a common interest, such as a liking for Irish setters, was the true basis for happiness, and that the illusion of love was a blight imposed by the film industry, and almost entirely responsible for the high rate of divorce. Similar economic backgrounds, financial security, belonging to the same church—these were the pillars of the married union. By an astonishing coincidence, the fathers of Carol and Howard were both attorneys and both had been defeated in their one attempt to get elected a judge. Carol and Howard were both vaguely Protestant, although a serious discussion of religious beliefs would have gravely embarrassed them. And Howard, best of all, was sober, old enough to know his own mind, and absolutely reliable. He was an economist who had sense enough to attach himself to a corporation that continued to pay his salary during his loan to

the government. There was no reason for the engagement or the marriage to fail.

Carol, with great efficiency, nearly at once set about the business of falling in love. Love required only the right conditions, like a geranium. It would wither exposed to bad weather or in dismal surrounding misty background of the Eiffel tower and little things; indeed, Carol rated the chances of love in a cottage or a furnished room at zero. Given a good climate, enough money, and a pair of good-natured, *intelligent* (her college lectures had stressed this) people, one had only to sit back and watch it grow. All winter, then, she looked for these right conditions in Paris. When, at first, nothing happened, she blamed it on the weather. She was often convinced she would fall deeply in love with Howard if only it would stop raining. Undaunted, she waited for better times.

Howard had no notion of any of this. His sudden proposal to Carol had been quite out of character—he was uncommonly cautious—and he alternated between a state of numbness and a state of self-congratulation. Before his engagement he had sometimes been lonely, a malaise he put down to overwork, and he was discontented with his bachelor households, for he did not enjoy collecting old pottery or making little casserole dishes. Unless he stumbled on a competent housemaid, nothing ever got done. This in itself would not have spurred him into marriage had he not been seriously unsettled by the visit of one of his sisters, who advised him to marry some nice girl before it was too late. "Soon," she told him, "you'll just be a person who fills in at dinner."

Howard saw the picture at once, and was deeply moved by it.

(1953)

## 2000 Language and Composition Question 2--Gandhi

In the following passage, George Orwell uses the example of Gandhi to make an argument for choosing human imperfection over "sainthood." As you read Orwell's remarks, note his choice of details and his tone. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Orwell criticizes Gandhi's position and assess how effectively Orwell develops his own position.

Close friendships, Gandhi<sup>1</sup> says, are dangerous, because "friends react on one another" and through loyalty to a friend one can be led into wrong-doing. This is unquestionably true. Moreover, if one is to  
5 love God, or to love humanity as a whole, one cannot give one's preference to any individual person. This again is true, and it marks the point at which the humanistic and the religious attitude cease to be reconcilable. To an ordinary human being, love means  
10 nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others. The autobiography<sup>2</sup> leaves it uncertain whether Gandhi behaved in an inconsiderate way to his wife and children, but at any rate it makes clear that on three occasions he was willing to let his wife  
15 or a child die rather than administer the animal for prescribed by the doctor. It is true that the threatened death never actually occurred, and also that Gandhi with, one gathers, a good deal of moral pressure in the opposite direction-always gave the patient the  
20 choice of staying alive at the price of committing

a sin: still, if the decision had been solely his own, he would have forbidden the animal food, whatever the risks might be. There must, he says, be some limit to what we will do in order to remain alive, and  
25 the limit is well on this side of chicken broth. This attitude is perhaps a noble one, but, in the sense which-I think-most people would give to the word, it is inhuman. The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is some-  
30 times willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up  
35 by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals. No doubt alcohol, tobacco, and so forth, are things that a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing that human beings must avoid.

(1949)

<sup>1</sup>Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1945). Political and spiritual leader in India

<sup>2</sup>Gandhi's autobiography. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*

## 2001 Language and Composition Question 3—Sontag Photography

Carefully read the following passage by Susan Sontag. Then write an essay in which you support, refute, or qualify Sontag's claim that photography limits our understanding of the world. Use appropriate evidence to develop your argument.

5 Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph. Of course, photographs fill in blanks in our mental pictures of the present and the past: for example, Jacob Riis's images of New York  
10 squalor in the 1880's are sharply instructive to those unaware that urban poverty in late-nineteenth-century America was really that Dickensian. Nevertheless, the camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses. As Brecht points out, a photograph  
15 of the Krupp works\* reveals virtually nothing about that organization. In contrast to the amorous relation, which is based on how something looks, understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time and must be explained in time. Only that  
20 which narrates can make us understand.

The limit of photographic knowledge of the world is that, while it can goad conscience, it can, finally, never be ethical or political knowledge. The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some  
25 kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. It will be a knowledge at bargain prices—a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom ... The very muteness of what is, hypothetically, comprehensible in photographs is what constitutes their attraction and  
30 provocativeness. The omnipresence of photographs has an incalculable effect on our ethical sensibility. By furnishing this already crowded world with a duplicate one of images, photography makes us feel that the world is more available than it really is.  
35 Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution.

-*On Photography*, 1977

\*Krupp: a German weapons manufacturing firm that was instrumental in the Nazi rearmament effort of the 1930's

## 1995 Literature and Composition Question 2—"Eleven"

Read the following short story carefully. Then write an essay analyzing how the author, Sandra Cisneros, uses literary techniques to characterize Rachel.

### ELEVEN

What they don't understand about birthdays and what they never tell you is that when you're eleven, you're also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one. And when  
5 you wake up on your eleventh birthday you expect to feel eleven, but you don't- You open your eyes and everything's just like yesterday, only it's today. And you don't feel eleven at all. You feel like you're still ten. And you are - underneath the year that makes you  
10 eleven.

Like some days you might say something stupid, and that's the part of you that's still ten. Or maybe some days you might need to sit on your mama's lap because you're scared, and that's the part of you that's five.  
15 And maybe one day when you're all grown up maybe you will need to cry like if you're three, and that's okay. That's what I tell Mama when she's sad and needs to cry. Maybe she's feeling three.

Because the way you grow old is kind of like an  
20 onion or like the rings inside a tree trunk or like my little wooden dolls that fit one inside the other, each year inside the next one. That's how being eleven years old is.

You don't feel eleven. Not right away. It takes a few  
25 days. weeks even, sometimes even months before you say Eleven when they ask you. And you don't feel smart eleven, not until you're almost twelve. That's the way it is.

Only today I wish I didn't have only eleven years  
30 rattling inside me like pennies in a tin Band-Aid box, Today I wish I was one hundred and two instead of eleven because if I was one hundred and two I'd have known what to say when Mrs. Price put the red sweater on my desk. I would've known how to tell her it wasn't  
35 mine instead of just sitting there with that look on my face and nothing coming out of my mouth.

"Whose is this?" Mrs. Price says, and she holds the red sweater up in the air for all the class to see.

"Whose? It's been sitting in the coatroom for a month."

40 "Not mine," says everybody, "Nor me."

"It has to belong to somebody," Mrs. Price keeps

saying, but nobody can remember. It's an ugly sweater with red plastic buttons and a collar and sleeves all stretched out like you could use it for a jump rope. It's  
45 maybe a thousand years old and even if it belonged to me I wouldn't say so.

Maybe because I'm skinny, maybe because she doesn't like me, that stupid Sylvia Saldivar says, "I think it belongs to Rachel-- An ugly sweater like that  
50 all raggedy and old, but Mrs. Price believes her. Mrs. Price takes the sweater and puts it right on my desk, but when I open my mouth nothing comes out.

"That's not, I don't, you're not Not mine." I finally say in a little voice that was maybe me when I  
55 was four.

"Of course it's yours," Mrs. Price says. "I remember you wearing it once." Because she's older and the teacher, she's right and I'm not.

Not mine, not mine, not, mine, but Mrs. Price is  
60 already turning to page thirty-two, and math problem number four. I don't know why but all of a sudden I'm feeling sick inside, like the part of me that's three wants to come out of my eyes, only I squeeze them shut tight and bite down on my teeth real hard and try  
65 to remember today I am eleven, eleven. Mama is making a cake for me for tonight, and when Papa comes home everybody will sing Happy birthday, happy birthday to you.

But when the sick feeling goes away and I open my  
70 eyes, the red sweater's still sitting there like a big red mountain. I move the red sweater to the corner of my desk with my ruler. I move my pencil and books and eraser as far from it as possible. I even move my chair a little to the right- Not mine, not mine, not mine.  
75 In my head I'm thinking how long till lunchtime, how long till I can take the red sweater and throw it

over the schoolyard fence, or leave it hanging on a parking meter, or bunch it up into a little ball and toss it in the alley. Except when math period ends Mrs. Price says loud and in front of everybody, "Now, Rachel, that's enough," because she sees I've shoved the red sweater to the tippy-tip corner of my desk and it's hanging all over the edge like a waterfall, but I don't care.

85 "Rachel," Mrs. Price says. She says it like she's getting mad. "You put that sweater on right now and no more nonsense."

"But it's not—"

"Now!" Mrs. Price says.

90 This is when I wish I wasn't eleven because all the years inside of me—ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one—are pushing at the back of my eyes when I put one arm through one sleeve of the sweater that smells like cottage cheese, and then the other arm through the other and stand there with my arms apart like if the sweater hurts me and it does, all itchy and full of germs that aren't even mine,

That's when everything I've been holding in since this morning. since when Mrs. Price put the sweater on my desk, finally lets go, and all of a sudden I'm crying in front of everybody. I wish I was invisible but I'm not. I'm eleven and it's my birthday today and I'm

crying like I'm three in front of everybody. I put my head down on the desk and bury my face in my stupid clown-sweater arms. My face all hot and spit coming out of my mouth because I can't stop the little animal noises from coming out of me until there aren't any more tears left in my eyes, and it's just my body shaking like when you have the hiccups, and my whole head hurts like when you drink milk too fast

110 But the worst part is right before the bell rings for lunch. That stupid Phyllis Lopez, who is even dumber than Sylvia Saldivar, says she remembers the red sweater is hers! I take it off right away and give it to her, only Mrs. Price pretends like everything's okay.

115 Today I'm eleven. There's a cake Mama's making for tonight and when Papa comes home from work we'll eat it. There'll be candles and presents and everybody will sing Happy birthday, happy birthday to YOU, Rachel, only it's too late.

I'm eleven today. I'm eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, and one, but I wish I was one hundred and two. I wish I was anything but eleven, because I want today to be far away already, far away like a runaway balloon, like a tiny o in the sky, so tiny—tiny you have to close your eyes to see it.

## The "Coke letters"

The following letters constitute the complete correspondence between an executive of the Coca-Cola company and a representative of Grove Press. Read the letters carefully. Then write an essay analyzing the rhetorical strategies each writer uses to achieve his purpose and explaining which letter offers the more persuasive case.

March 25, 1970

Mr. R W. Seaver  
Executive Vice President  
Grove Press, Inc.  
214 Mercer Street  
New York, New York 10012

Dear Mr. Seaver:

Several people have called to our attention your advertisement for *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* by Jim Haskins, which appeared in the *New York Times* March 3, 1970. The theme of the ad is "This book is like a weapon... it's the real thing."

Since our company has made use of "It's the Real Thing" to advertise Coca-Cola long prior to the publication of the book, we are writing to ask you to stop using this theme or slogan in connection with the book.

We believe you will agree that it is undesirable for our companies to make simultaneous use of "the real thing" in connection with our respective products. There will always be likelihood of confusion as to the source or sponsorship of the goods, and the use by such prominent companies would dilute the distinctiveness of the trade slogan and diminish its effectiveness and value as an advertising and merchandising tool.

"It's the Real Thing" was first used in advertising for Coca-Cola over twenty-seven years ago to refer to our product. We first used it in print advertising in 1942 and extended it to outdoor advertising, including painted walls—some of which are still displayed throughout the country. The line has appeared in advertising for Coca-Cola during succeeding years. For example, in 1954 we used "There's this about Coke—You Can't Beat the Real Thing" in national advertising. We resumed national use of "It's the Real Thing" in the summer of 1969 and it is our main thrust for 1970.

Please excuse my writing so fully, but I wanted to explain why we feel it necessary to ask you and your associates to use another line to advertise Mr. Haskins' book

We appreciate your cooperation and your assurance that you will discontinue the use of "It's the real thing."

Sincerely,  
Ira C. Herbert

## The "Coke letters" the reply

March 31, 1970

Mr. Ira C. Herbert  
Coca-Cola USA  
P.O. Drawer 1734  
Atlanta, Georgia 30301

Dear Mr. Herbert:

Thank you for your letter of March 25th, which has just reached me, doubtless because of the mail strike.

We note with sympathy your feeling that you have a proprietary interest in the phrase "It's the real thing," and I can fully understand that the public might be confused by our use of the expression, and mistake a book by a Harlem schoolteacher for a six-pack of Coca-Cola. Accordingly, we have instructed all our salesmen to notify bookstores that whenever a customer comes in and asks for a copy of *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* they should request the sales personnel to make sure that what the customer wants is the book, rather than a Coke. This, we think, should protect your interest and in no way harm ours.

We would certainly not want to dilute the distinctiveness of your trade slogan nor diminish its effectiveness as an advertising and merchandising tool, but it did occur to us that since the slogan is so closely identified with your product, those who read our ad may well tend to go out and buy a Coke rather than our book. We have discussed this problem in an executive committee meeting, and by a vote of seven to six decided that, even if this were the case, we would be happy to give Coke the residual benefit of our advertising.

Problems not unlike the ones you raise in your letter have occurred to us in the past. You may recall that we published *Games People Play* which became one of the biggest nonfiction best-sellers of all time, and spawned conscious imitations (*Games Children Play*, *Games Psychiatrists Play*, *Games Ministers Play*, etc.). I am sure you will agree that this posed a far more direct and deadly threat to both the author and ourselves than our use of "It's the real thing." Further, *Games People Play* has become part of our language, and one sees it constantly in advertising, as a newspaper headline, etc. The same is true of another book which we published six or seven years ago, *One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding*.

Given our strong sentiments concerning the First Amendment, we will defend to the death your right to use "It's the real thing" in any advertising you care to. We would hope you would do the same for us, especially when no one here or in our advertising agency, I am sorry to say, realized that you owned the phrase. We were merely quoting in our ads Peter S. Prescott's review of *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* in *Look* which begins "*Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* is the real thing, a short, spare, honest book which will, I suspect, be read a generation hence as a classic ...."

With all best wishes,

Sincerely yours,  
Richard Seaver

## 2003 Language and Composition Question 3—Dillard/Audubon

The two passages below, one by John James Audubon and the other by Annie Dillard, describe large flocks of birds in flight. Read the passages carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast how each writer describes the birds and conveys their effect on the writer as observer.

### Passage 1

In the autumn of 1813, I left my house at Henderson, on the banks of the Ohio. on my way to Louisville. In passing over the Barrens a few miles beyond Hardensburgh. I observed the pigeons flying  
5 from north-east to south-west in greater numbers than I thought I had ever seen them before. and feeling an inclination to count the flocks that might pass within the reach of my eye in one hour, I dismounted, seated myself on an eminence, and began to mark with my  
10 pencil, making a dot for every flock that passed. In a short time finding the task which I had undertaken impracticable as the birds poured in in countless multitudes. I rose, and counting the dots then put down, found that 163 had been made in twenty-one  
15 natures. I travelled on, and still met more the farther I proceeded. The air was literally filled *with* Pigeons; the light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse; the dung fell in spots, not unlike melting flakes of snow; and the continued buzz of wings had a  
20 tendency to lull my senses to repose.

Whilst waiting for dinner at YOUNG'S inn, at the confluence of Salt-River *with* the Ohio, I saw, at my leisure. immense legions still going by. with a front reaching far beyond the Ohio on the west, and  
25 the beech-wood forests directly on the east of me. Not a single bird alighted; for not a nut or acorn was that year to be seen in the neighbourhood. They consequently flew so high, that different trials to reach them with a capital rifle proved ineffectual;  
30 nor did the reports disturb them in the least. I cannot describe to you the extreme beauty of their aerial evolutions, when a Hawk chanced to press upon the rear of a flock. At once. like a torrent, and *with* a noise like thunder, they rushed into a compact mass.  
35 pressing upon each other towards the centre. In these almost solid masses. they darted forward in undulating and angular lines, descended and swept close over the earth with inconceivable velocity, mounted perpendicularly so as to resemble a vast  
40 column, and, when high, were seen wheeling and twisting within their continued lines, which then resembled the coils of a gigantic serpent.

John James Audubon

*Ornithological Biographies.* 1831-1839

### Passage 2

Out of the dimming sky a speck appeared. then another, and another. It was the starlings going to roost. They gathered deep in the distance. flock sifting into flock, and strayed towards me, transparent and  
5 whirling, like smoke. They seemed to unravel as they flew, lengthening in curves, like a loosened skein.<sup>1</sup> I didn't move; they flew directly over my head for half an hour. The flight extended like a fluttering banner an unfurled oriflamme<sup>2</sup> in either direction as  
10 far as I could see. Each individual bird bobbed and knitted up and down in the flight at apparent random. for no known reason except that that's how starlings fly. yet all remained perfectly spaced. The flocks each tapered at either end from a rounded middle, like an  
15 eye Over my head I heard a sound of beaten air, like a million shook rugs. a muffled whuff. Into the woods they sifted without shifting a twig, right through the crowns of trees. intricate and rushing. like wind.

After half an hour. the last of the stragglers had  
20 vanished into the trees. I stood with difficulty, bashed by the unexpectedness of this beauty. and my spread lungs roared. My eyes pricked from the effort of trying to trace a feathered dot's passage through a weft<sup>3</sup> of limbs. Could tiny birds be sifting through me right now, birds wincing through the gaps between my cells, touching nothing, but quickening in my tissues, fleet?

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.* 1974

<sup>1</sup>A length of yarn or thread wound in a loose, elongated coil

<sup>2</sup> An ensign, banner, or standard

<sup>3</sup>The horizontal threads in a piece of weaving

To help our students get ready for this exam...

what will we tell them?

what will we have them practice?

what will we ask of ourselves?

## Remember

If you were taking a calculus class, you would want to know that your teacher was good at calculus AND good at other math classes which come after it. The same thing holds true for our middle school English students: they deserve to have teachers with knowledge of how English works well beyond the confines of our middle school classrooms.

## Essay question vs. Exam question

David Joliffe, the Chief Reader for the AP Language Exam recently came to our district (spring, 2004) to work with our students and our teachers. He spoke with our AP Literature students in the morning and our AP Language students in the afternoon. I was there in the morning, and this is what I heard:

- There are two types of questions on the free response portion of the test:  
exam questions and essay questions.
- Exam questions have fairly clear-cut answers, as in “Read these two poems carefully. Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss the similarities and differences.”
- Essay questions require more careful thought and might have lots of different answers. The essay answer should be a sort of blueprint for the thought that brought the student to this answer. These answers will use language to allow for different interpretations, rather than stating very confidently that “this is the result of my comparison of the two poems.”
- As you may already know, the word *essay* comes from the French, *assayer*, meaning to try. This was a revelation to the seniors in the room, and it helped them understand the difference between essay questions and exam questions. With an essay question, we’re making an attempt. We’re trying to come to an answer, knowing full well that just one answer is probably not possible.
- Question 3 is often an essay question. (I want to write *always*, but I’m an English teacher, and the words ALWAYS and NEVER have long since been removed from my vocabulary.)
- He gave the seniors this Question 3: “In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Choose a work of literary merit that confronts the reader or audience with a scene or scenes of violence. In a well-organized essay, explain how the scene or scenes contribute to the meaning of the complete work.”
- He asked students to list the reasons violence might appear in literature. Some of their answers were:
  - To bring conflict to life, as in *Count of Monte Cristo*
  - To offer historical context, as in *Gone with the Wind*
  - To mirror life—the violence of humor, as in *Catch-22*  
(Snowden was a BIG part of this discussion.)
  - To show revenge and the need for resolution, as in *Hamlet*
  - To entertain, as in satire
  - To shock an audience to grasp a higher message
  - To appeal to people’s need for heroism
  - To threaten/frighten/awaken
  - To criticize the motives of people who resort to violence

## 2003 AP ENGLISH LITERATURE SCORING GUIDELINE

### Question 3: Tragic Figures as Instruments of the Suffering of Others

General Directions: The score that you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay as a whole—its content, its style, its mechanics. Reward the writers for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well written essay may be raised by one point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a three (3).

- 9-8** These well-focused and persuasive essays identify a tragic character who functions as an instrument of others' suffering. The essays also discuss how that suffering contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole. Using apt textual support, these essays not only explore the nature of the suffering, but they also analyze how that suffering contributes to the work's tragic vision. Although not without flaws, these essays exhibit the writer's ability to analyze a literary work with insight and understanding, to control a thesis, and to write with clarity, precision, coherence, and—in the case of a nine (9) essay—with particular persuasiveness and/or stylistic flair.
- 7-6** These competent essays identify a tragic character in an appropriate novel or play and analyze that character's impact on others' suffering. They also attempt to articulate how that suffering he or she brings on others contributes to the work's tragic vision. Although these essays have some insight, the analysis provided by the 7-6 essays is less thorough, less perceptive, and/or less specific in supporting detail than that of the 9-8 essays. References to the text may not be as apt or as persuasive. Essays scored a seven (7) will demonstrate more sophistication in both substance and in style than those scored a six (6), though both 7's and 6's will be generally well written and free from significant or sustained misinterpretations.
- 5** These essays tend to be superficial in analysis even though they may respond to the assigned task and may offer a plausible interpretation of an appropriate novel or play. They often rely upon plot summary that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Although they may obliquely attempt to explain the theme, the tragic vision, they may demonstrate a rather simplistic understanding of it. Typically, these essays reveal unsophisticated thinking and/or immature writing.
- 4-3** These lower-half essays reflect an incomplete or oversimplified understanding of the work discussed, or they may fail to establish how the tragic figure brings about others' suffering or how that suffering contributes to the work's tragic vision. They may rely on plot summary alone. Their assertions may be unsupported or even irrelevant. Often wordy, elliptical, or repetitious, these essays lack control over the elements of college-level composition. Essays scored a three (3) exhibit more than one of the stylistic errors; they may also be marred by significant misinterpretation and/or poor development.
- 2-1** These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. Often, they are unacceptably brief. They may be poorly written on several counts and contain distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. The writer's remarks are presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence. Especially inept, vacuous, and/or unsound essays must be scored a one (1).
- 0** These essays give a response with no more than a reference to the task.
- These essays are either left blank or are completely off topic.

## 2001 AP ENGLISH LITERATURE SCORING GUIDELINE

### Question 2: Fielding's *Tom Jones*

General Directions: This scoring guide will be useful for most of the essays that you read, but in problematic cases, please consult with your table leader. The score you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay as a whole. Reward the writers for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by one point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a three (3).

- 9-8** These essays offer a persuasive interpretation of how Henry Fielding characterizes Mr. Allworthy and Mrs. Deborah Wilkins. Specifically, they identify techniques and then analyze how the author uses them to reveal the characters of Allworthy and Wilkins. (For example, they may even attempt an analysis of Fielding's comedic strategies.) These essays make apt and specific references to the passage, effectively analyzing the nature of the characters' responses to the discovery of the child and what it reveals about each of them. Though the essays may not be error-free, they are perceptive in their analysis of character and demonstrate writing that is clear and precise. Generally, the nine (9) essays reveal a more sophisticated analysis and a more effective control of language than do essays scored an eight (8).
- 7-6** These essays *offer a* reasonable interpretation of Fielding's passage, in which the writers identify the techniques and analyze how the author employs them in creating characters. Although not as convincing or as thoroughly developed papers as those in the highest range, they demonstrate the writer's ability to express ideas with clarity, insight, and control. Generally, the seven (7) essays present a more developed analysis and a more consistent command of the elements of effective composition than do essays scored a six (6).
- 5** These essays tend to be simplistic in analysis of techniques even though they may respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of Fielding's passage. They often rely on paraphrase, but the paraphrase will exhibit some analysis, implicit or explicit. The discussion of characterization may be slight and/or confusing, and the treatment of the differences between the two characters may be vague, formulaic, or inadequately supported by references to the passage itself. There may be minor misinterpretations of either or both characters. These writers demonstrate control of ideas, but the writing may be flawed by surface errors that do not create confusion for the reader. These essays are not as well-conceived, organized, or developed as upper-half papers.
- 4-3** These lower-half essays offer a less than thorough understanding of the task or less than adequate treatment of the techniques. They may demonstrate misunderstanding of some aspect of the passage. The analysis of the techniques of characterization may be only partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant. These essays may rely on paraphrase only. The writing often demonstrates a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, an accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a three (3) may contain significant misreadings and/or distracting errors in grammar and mechanics.
- 2-1** These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. They may seriously misread the passage, may be unacceptably brief, or may be incoherent. They may contain pervasive errors which interfere with understanding. Although some attempt has been made to respond to the question, the writer's assertions are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the passage itself. Essays scored a one (1) contain little coherent discussion of the passage.

## About the AP Scoring Guide

More notes from the David Joliffe visit:

- We looked at two questions, one exam and one essay, and he gave us some time to organize our own thoughts, as if we were taking the exam at that moment. Then we looked at student samples, deciding which was the 8-9, 6-7, and 3-4.
- He told us that the 9-point rubric is really a 4-point rubric:
  - EXCELLENT. This is the 8.
  - ABOVE AVERAGE. 6 lands squarely here.
  - BELOW AVERAGE. These are usually the papers that score 4.
  - REALLY POOR. This is the 2.
- We can fit our odd numbers into the rubric as comparisons of these four points:
  - 9 is through the roof. It's better than excellent, which is the eight. When we read it, we say, "WOW! Let me get out of this student's way!"
  - 7 is like the six, just a little better. Usually it's better in terms of language control.
  - 5 is the middle of the road. These papers tend to move in and out of focus, almost having it then losing it. He compared a five to a car radio that has a dial. (No senior in the room seemed to remember the dials, but for all of the teachers in the room, it was an apt comparison.) When we turn the dial, the signal becomes clearer to a point. Then we've gone too far, and the static breaks in.
  - 3 is like a four, but worse. He called it a "diminished four."
  - 1 is like a two, but worse. These papers are "really, really poor."