

**AP English Literature and Composition
Question 3: Literary Argument
2020 Scoring Commentaries
(Applied to 2018 Student Responses)**

Index of Scores for Samples: Question 3

Sample Reference	Row A	Row B	Row C
I	1	4	1
H	1	4	1
G	1	4	0
E	1	2	0
C	0	1	0
B	0	1	0
A	0	0	0

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Sample I (*Invisible Man*)

Score: 6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it responds to the prompt by identifying a character’s gift that is both advantageous and problematic, presents a strong defensible thesis, and offers an interpretation of the significance of that gift to the meaning of the work as a whole: “Although the ‘gift’ of metaphorical invisibility, as shown through the novel’s varied characters, can be utilized to (arguably) bolster freedom—freedom in terms of anonymity—Ellison, through the ‘Invisible Man’s’ reflections, asserts that such invisibility is immensely impairing, as it stubbornly prevents its victims from making an impact [sic] on society as they’re imprisoned in oppressive expectation. Ellison ultimately implies that an acceptance of one’s invisibility, rather than a firm ideology on how to relieve it, is the path to self-understanding” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points in Row B because it integrates specific evidence from *Invisible Man* and consistently provides well-developed commentary to support a line of reasoning about how the complex nature of the gift contributes to the meaning of the novel as a whole. The student references how the gift can be an advantage because it allows the unnamed narrator to steal electricity, his grandfather to subtly mock prejudice without recourse, and a veteran to move “through society anonymously secure from the strict demands of social reputations and influence” (paragraph 2). The student then explains in detail the disadvantages of the complex gift of invisibility with well-integrated evidence of “stereotype-driven invisibility” in paragraph three (the narrator’s eating of buttered yams, a black activist’s ironic selling of “Sambo dolls” controlled by “transparent strings” and that activist’s murder by a policeman for disobedience) and explicit commentary that builds toward a convincing interpretation about the meaning of the work as a whole.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row C because it identifies and explores complexities and tensions within the selected work. The response clearly recognizes and accounts for contradictory aspects of the gift as it examines the gift “as a tool for freedom and anonymity” while also admitting “it is simultaneously incapacitating” and creates “many roadblocks” (paragraph 4). Examination of this complexity also helps to situate the response in the specific context of “the African-American’s struggle to combat ubiquitous prejudice while attaining self-understanding” in the “world of racism that America encapsulates—especially in the mid-20th-century” (paragraph 4). Lastly, the prose is rendered in a style that is vivid and persuasive.

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Sample H (*Mrs. Dalloway*)

Score: 6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it responds to the prompt by presenting a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation about the complex nature of a character’s gift: “Elizabeth’s frustration at the way she is stereotyped demonstrates that—for women trapped in strictly-enforced gender role—traditional beauty is a double-edged sword” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points in Row B because it integrates specific evidence to support consistently well-developed commentary, explaining the relationship between thesis and evidence and establishing a strong line of reasoning as a result. The response builds to an interpretation of the work as a whole by comparing Miss Kilman, a “social pariah” who deems “herself above such pursuits” as beauty and wealth, and Elizabeth’s friends who believe “beauty holds the key to social success in their society, and so view comparisons to flowers [‘passive and immobile’] as the highest compliment.” In paragraph four, the response provides a clear interpretation of the work as a whole: “Unjust gender roles have placed Elizabeth in a double-bind. Without her beauty, she would be ridiculed, isolated and reduced to Miss. Kilman’s [low] status. With beauty, Elizabeth is pegged as a passive flower and relegated to traditional women’s roles...Elizabeth’s ultimate appearance at Clarissa’s party suggests that perhaps she chooses beauty and society—but was it even a choice at all, with the cost of eschewing these qualities so great?”

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row C because it both develops a complex literary argument about gender norms and women’s status in the novel and establishes that the world of the novel offers insights into the broader context of modern society. In the first paragraph, the response introduces a fitting analogy of beautiful actresses who become typecast to explain the similarities between real and fictional worlds and returns to that analogy to conclude that: “Elizabeth’s appearance has cast her in the role of a gorgeous [ingenue]. Like beautiful Hollywood actresses, Elizabeth faces a long battle against gender norms if she wishes to break out of her typecasting” (paragraph 5). The response explores the complexities and tensions of Elizabeth’s “double-bind” within the text, as well as that of women in the broader context of modern society. In addition to the sophistication of thought demonstrated in this interpretation, the response employs a style that is vivid and persuasive throughout.

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Sample G (*Atonement*)

Score: 5/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it responds to the prompt and presents a defensible thesis. By identifying Briony’s gift as the “gift of prolific writing at a young age,” the response focuses on a considerable skill as her gift but then establishes a complexity related to that gift as her “attempts to solve her own problems through writing happy endings” prove “not only futile but also destructive” (paragraph one). This also suggests an interpretation of the work as a whole which the response later attempts to expound upon: “despite our desire to want the world a certain way, we cannot assert out control unnecessarily” (paragraph 5).

Row B: 4/ 4

The response earned four points in Row B because it incorporates specific evidence to directly support the thesis and supporting claims and it provides well-developed commentary that explains the relationship between the evidence and claims thereby establishing the line of reasoning. It argues that Briony’s attempts to assert control over her cousins through writing a play introduces “the detrimental effects Briony’s gift can have on the Tallis family” (paragraph 2) and that Briony’s gift “becomes more of a burden” (paragraph three) later in the novel since McEwan punishes her with vascular dementia for misusing her gift so that she is no longer able to write. The line of reasoning continues to build toward an interpretation of the novel as a whole in paragraph five, where the student writes, “McEwan conveys the message to readers that despite our desire to want the world a certain way, we cannot assert our own control unnecessarily because the results may not be what we expect.”

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because it makes a statement about how the complex gift relates to a possible meaning of the work as a whole but does not consistently maintain that interpretation, and its attempt to contextualize its interpretation results in generalization: “Briony’s gift of writing serves as a reminder that although we may attempt to assert control over every aspect of our life, we need to realize that life is messy and it is impossible to truly mold life to perfection, or our own terms” (paragraph 4).

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Sample E (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

Score: 3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it responds to the prompt by identifying a character's complex gift and presents a defensible thesis that offers claims about the gift itself, explaining that Gray “does not age and although at first this seems like a blessing to him, it quickly begins to burden him and arise [*sic*] problems” (paragraph 1). This does address the complex nature of Dorian’s gift as it “seems like a blessing” but “quickly begins to burden him.” While the thesis verges on plot summary, the framing of Dorian’s agelessness as a complex gift renders it barely acceptable.

Row B: 2/4

The response earned two points in Row B. While it makes some specific references to the text and provides commentary, that commentary is limited and almost uniformly under-developed. Like paragraph two, for example, much of the commentary is shot through with plot summary. Similarly, interpretation frequently lapses into cliché: “Wilde uses Dorian Gray's gift to portray the overall meaning of the book that youth and beauty are not everything, that being vain will only arise problems with not only yourself [*sic*], but with those around you as well” (paragraph 3).

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because it does not demonstrate a sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument. It offers overly generalized claims such as “Wilde portrays that being to self-conceded [*sic*] and vain leads to inevitable [*sic*] misery” (paragraph 3) and “beauty is not everything and how it can lead to many problems and misery” (paragraph 4). It uses language that is ineffective in that it does not enhance the argument and interferes with the clear communication of ideas. While the response does address how the complex nature of “[t]he gift of eternal youth and beauty leads to the death of his friends and broken relationships with others—leading Dorian Gray to be miserable” (paragraph 4), it does not consistently address or examine it elsewhere.

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Sample C (*The Tempest*)

Score: 1/6 Points (A0 – B1 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row A. It attempts to identify multiple gifts in *The Tempest* – the wizards’ “special powers” (paragraph 1) and “the gift of his daughter” (paragraph 4), but which gift is being argued in the response is vague. Consequently, it remains unclear how either gift contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.

Row B: 1/4

The response earned one point in Row B because it provides only vague references to the text: “This wizard has special powers, with them he was able to free someone from a spell and make them a servant” (paragraph 2). It summarizes a vague outline of the plot, but the plot summary does not rise to the level of an explanation of how it might serve the claim.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because it does not meet the criteria called for in the rubric.

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Sample B (*Frankenstein*)

Score: 1/6 Points (A0 – B1 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row A. The intended thesis restates the prompt and simply inserts the novel’s title and main character: “A novel that had a character with a literal or figurative gift was the main character in *Frankenstein*. He was given a gift that was a burden, but also an advantage and a problem” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 1/4

The response earned one point in Row B because it provides evidence that is mostly general, and it presents thin plot summary that does not serve a defensible claim or rise to the level of commentary or explanation: “*Frankenstein* was created by a mad scientist. He was created for evil. He was also created to be hideous. *Frankenstein* terrorized the town. Everyone in the village was terrified. He became a burden when he never meant to do harm” (paragraph 2). In paragraph three, the response does offer an observation, but this is not related to the idea of how gifts are complex: “The gift that he was given contributes to the story by teaching a lesson to not judge someone based on looks.”

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because it does not meet the criteria called for in the rubric.

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Sample A (*Metamorphosis*)

Score: 0/0 Points (A0 – B0 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

The two-sentence response did not earn the point in Row A. It offers no thesis and merely mentions the prompt's concept, a gift that is advantageous and disadvantageous, in extremely vague terms: In *Metamorphosis* “[a]lthough many saw his change as purely a burden, the change revealed a lot about the main character which could've been perceived as a gift” (sentence 2).

Row B: 0/4

The response did not earn any points in Row B because it merely repeats from the prompt the concept of a gift that is an advantage and a handicap and offers neither further commentary on a gift nor textual references.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because it does not meet the criteria called for in the rubric.