

**AP English Literature and Composition
Question 3: Literary Argument
Scoring Commentaries on 2020 Rubrics
(Applied to 2019 Student Responses)**

Index of Scores for Samples: Question 3

Sample Reference	Row A	Row B	Row C
DD	1	4	1
J	1	4	1
M	1	4	0
FF	1	3	1
HH	1	3	0
TT	1	2	0
N	1	1	0
ZZ	0	1	0

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Sample DD (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*)
6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A by offering a defensible—and quite complex—thesis in the initial paragraph that responds directly to the prompt: “Through McMurphy’s idealism, he allows the patients to regain a sense of dignity and he charts the course for his ultimate demise; through this, Kesey is able to show that despite the inevitable negative consequences which will result from idealism, it is a necessary quality to ignite social change.” The statement also offers a line of reasoning when it notes that it will discuss both the positive and negative consequences of idealism, a plan that will be followed in the organization of the response.

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points in Row B by offering specific references to the text that are relevant to the thesis about the positive and negative consequences of McMurphy’s idealism. The response mentions specific plot points in both body paragraphs—McMurphy’s TV watching, his fishing trip, his interaction with Bromden, Ratched’s responses—and offers careful and consistent commentary for each, connecting them not only to each other but back to the thesis to establish the line of reasoning and ultimately offering an interpretation of the work as a whole.

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row C primarily because the student’s interpretation is nuanced and complex and handles skillfully the textual contradictions and apparent paradoxes throughout the response. It also maintains a style that is appropriate to the argument with careful attention to transitions and connecting ideas. The result is a demonstration of sophisticated thinking and the development of a complex literary argument about the novel.

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Sample J (*Lord of the Flies*)
6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it offers a defensible thesis about the novel that responds directly to the prompt by noting a character’s idealism and its consequences and by offering a potential interpretation of the novel as a whole: “Through his character, Ralph, Golding conveys that holding an idealistic view of the world is dangerous: while temporary success can be achieved, it ultimately leads to the destruction of governmental institutions and chaos. He encourages readers to adopt a more realistic view of the world and recognize the inherent evil in all people.”

Row B: 4/4

The response earned all four points in Row B by including well chosen, specific details from the novel and connecting them through consistent commentary to the thesis, thereby establishing the line of reasoning. For example, the response notes the details of the conch shell and the signal fire and show how they illustrate Ralph’s idealistic belief that “democracy is somehow perfect” and that “the boys—being good, rational beings—will follow the rules.” In a later paragraph noting the details of the tragic climax of the novel, the response comments: “The death of Piggy shows the demise of good (Piggy) in the face of evil (Roger), while the shattering of the conch shell shows the completely dissolution of Ralph’s democracy on the island.” Finally, the response concludes with a reading of the novel as a whole by suggesting that “Golding therefore urges readers to accept the faults of humanity and the fact that no person or institution is perfect. In so doing, they can begin to create governments that stand strong and plans that work well.”

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row C for its nuanced interpretation which both recognizes complexity in Ralph’s idealism and situates the novel in a broader context (national governmental systems). Finally, its style is vivid and particularly persuasive, demonstrating a clear control over the organization and development. The result is a sophisticated response with a complex literary argument that responds to the prompt.

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Sample M (1984)

5/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A for its clear, inclusive opening sentence: “In the novel 1984 by George Orwell, the main character Winston Smith holds an ‘ideal view of the world’ to be able to live and love freely, which yields negative results by eventually leading to his imprisonment and torture, but highlights the meaning of the work as a whole which is to show the effects of control and oppression on a society.” The sentence establishes a clear thesis—that Smith’s “ideal view of the world . . . yields negative results.” It also ties the thesis to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points in Row B for its specific evidence from the text that are tied consistently back to a defensible interpretation of the meaning of the work as a whole. For example, in paragraph two, the response develops the idea that Winston is idealistic by contrasting Winston’s love for Julia with details about his job in the society and shows how the idealism is a motivating factor for the character. In turn, paragraph three details the negative consequences of such a motivation, again noting some specifics about the consequences of Winston’s actions.

Row C: 0/1

The response failed to earn the point in Row C because the thesis articulated at the beginning differs from the bolder claim made at the end. At the beginning the response seems to be arguing that the “meaning...is to show the effects of control and oppression on a society.” The point that oppressive societies do oppressive things that result in negative consequences for idealistic people seems more self-evident than complex. At the end, the effect that the response focuses on is how, when oppressed, creativity “is just given more power and influence over society as a whole.” In fact, the examples and commentary in the response show just the opposite—how creativity can be crushed. The result is an argument that seems more divided than complex.

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Sample FF (*The Grapes of Wrath*)
5/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a clearly defensible thesis, connected to the prompt: “The main characters, a family called the Joads, have an ideal view of life in California, and even though it turns out to be largely untrue, simply holding the ideal view brings positive consequences.” The thesis recognizes complexity and asserts an interpretation that must be supported.

Row B: 3/4

The response earned three points in Row B because it provides specific evidence from the novel to support the line of reasoning and connects that evidence back to the thesis through commentary. For example, the second paragraph mentions the details of the handbill as a way of showing where the Joad’s idealized view of California originated. In the third and fourth paragraphs, however, the evidence becomes broader and less specific, and the commentary becomes less developed as a result. The response does make claims about the effect of the idealism on the novel as a whole, but in paragraph four that discussion makes the broadest of sweeps and offers no specific details for support. The result is commentary that is uneven (detailed in one spot, sweeping in other spots), limited and underdeveloped.

Row C: 1/1

While the commentary may be limited in places, the response earned the point in Row C because it recognizes contradictions and complexities in the text (noting, for example, that the idealism is not always justified, but yet is crucial for survival). It also attempts to position an interpretation of the novel in a broader context: “highlighting the necessity of an ideal worldview to migrant farmers.” Finally, it uses the quotation from the prompt in apt ways to control the development of the response in a style that is especially appropriate to the student’s argument.

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Sample HH (*Candide*)

4/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point for its defensible thesis that also articulates a basic line of reasoning: “Candide’s ideal view of the world is satirized when he experiences tragedy and portrays the fallacy of believing in idealism. Human experience is cursed by political structures, treatment of women and corrupt human nature. His adherence to the ‘idealistic philosophy’ brings him pain and suffering, and ultimately the abandonment of his philosophy.”

Row B: 3/4

The response earned three points in Row B because it offers many instances of specific evidence that supports the thesis and line of reasoning. Commentary sometimes explains how evidence supports the line of reasoning, but at times, it fails to articulate the value of the evidence. For example, paragraph two fails to clarify the relationship between women and morality despite including specific evidence related to Cunégonde and Pangloss. Similarly, the essay concludes by citing Candide’s belief that “people ‘need to tend to their gardens,’” but commentary fails to connect the quote with the conclusion that it supports.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because it fails to demonstrate a sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument. The response repeats the central idea of how exaggeration helps readers see the ridiculousness of Candide’s stance, but does not explore nuances in the novel or account for alternative interpretations or contradictions. It does position the novel in the broader context of enlightenment philosophy, but that general notion is not concretely developed or supported in the response.

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Sample TT (*Crime and Punishment*)
3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A by including a defensible thesis about the novel: “The choices made within the novel, shows a gray area between the good and the bad. The characters idealisms both follow the good and the bad. The languages and interactions between characters allow for the reveal of the true effects on decisions based on life or death.” While the expression of the thesis is not entirely clear, it does respond to the prompt with an assertive claim about how the elements in the novel show “the good and the bad” nature of idealism.

Row B: 2/4

The response earned two points in Row B because it provides a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. It ties that evidence, rather simplistically, to good and bad results mentioned in the thesis. The consistent yoking of evidence to that thesis moves the response into the two-point range. The commentary keeps the evidence from being non-specific or vague. However, the commentary is slight and oversimplified which keeps it from the three-point range in this row.

Row C: 0/1

This response does not demonstrate sophistication in thought or the development of a complex literary argument. While it does, in the last paragraph, attempt to contextualize the novel more broadly, the attempt is underdeveloped and added on to the discussion rather than growing from it. The broad statements about “good and bad” do not take into consideration any moral nuances or alternative interpretations in the text.

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Sample N (*Lord of the Flies*)
2/6 Points (A1 – B1 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis, initially at the beginning but stated more clearly at the end: “Their own ideals lead to their downfall in the end by killing one another and the kids turning into savages.” This thesis clearly responds to the prompt with an interpretation of the novel.

Row B: 1/4

The response earned one point in Row B because it focuses on overarching narrative developments of the novel, rather than specific evidence and commentary that develop an interpretation in response to the prompt. For example, the response notes that “the kids figured that if they lived / controlled the islands as they thought adults did that the island would be very organized,” and “the kids soon away seemed to be excited to run the island with no rules,” but it offers no clear specific details. However, it does more than simply restate the prompt, and the references are not “incoherent” or “irrelevant.”

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because it does not demonstrate sophisticated thought or develop a complex literary argument. Instead, it makes general points. Also, it does not entertain alternative interpretations or paradoxical nuances. While it intimates a larger context for understanding the plot (the “view of the world”), that context is not defined or developed in any clear, coherent way.

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Sample ZZ (*The Kite Runner*)

1/6 Points (A0 – B1 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

This response did not earn the point in Row A because it includes no defensible thesis about the novel. Instead it offers a description or summary of the plot: “In Khaled Houssin’s novel ‘The Kite Runner’, the reader follows the life of a boy named Amir, and how his actions and view on life, will affect him as an adult.” Such a statement does not indicate whether his view on life is ideal or how such a view would, in fact, affect him.

Row B: 1/4

The response earned one point in Row B because although it references specific details from the novel, the two body paragraphs simply summarize the plot and do not explain how those details support an argument. The plot details do not seem to serve any defensible thesis.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because no argument is being made about the novel.