

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2017 AP[®] Art History Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	25,178		
• Number of Readers	156		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	2,795	11.1
	4	5,764	22.9
	3	6,854	27.2
	2	6,633	26.3
	1	3,132	12.4
• Global Mean	2.94		

The following comments on the 2017 free-response questions for AP[®] Art History were written by the Chief Reader, Heather Madar, Associate Professor, Humboldt State University. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question #1**Task:** Comparative Analysis**Topic:** Early Europe and Colonial Americas (200–1750 C.E.)**Max. Points:** 7**Mean Score:** 3.44***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

This question asked students to contrast the Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George with another devotional work that depicts the Virgin Mary from Early Europe and Colonial Americas (200–1750 C.E.). The question listed three options from the required course content that students could choose from, or they could select another relevant work from the specified content area. The intent of the question was to have students demonstrate an ability to contrast two works of art, focusing primarily on a difference in function. Students had to use visual and contextual evidence from both works to support the explanation.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- Responses generally focused on appropriate choices to answer the prompt, whether from the list provided or other appropriate works from the required course content. They were often able to provide two accurate identifiers to earn the identification point.
- Responses were generally able to provide visual evidence to describe the works, allowing nearly every response to earn an entry-level point. This was true for both the image provided—the Virgin (Theotokos) and Child between Saints Theodore and George—and also for the image that students chose, which they did not have in front of them and so were recalling from memory.
- Responses were generally able to contrast the two works, although some provided similarities when the question only asked for differences between the two works.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Responses revealed difficulty discussing the context of each image and providing specific contextual evidence to support the discussion. Responses often experienced difficulty delving into specific, relevant aspects of cultural context, instead providing generic discussions of Christianity. A deeper and more specific understanding of the cultural context of works of art is expected in the new curriculum.
- Responses reflected a somewhat surprising lack of knowledge about icons and their use and often didn't address the function of other devotional works apart from general statements about likely placement. While placement is related to function, placement and function are not interchangeable.
- Many responses revealed difficulty in making an explicit comparison between the two works in terms of their function as devotional objects, even if the answer showed clear understanding of the function of both objects. Too often responses jumped into providing evidence without first bringing the works together with an overall comparative statement. If the works were not explicitly brought into comparison the response was not able to earn the comparative point.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Theotokos is on a wall in a church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Theotokos is a Byzantine icon that was intended to be used in meditation or to focus on during prayer.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <i>Röttgen Pietà</i> was displayed in a home or in a church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The <i>Röttgen Pietà</i> was intended to evoke agony in the viewer and make them empathize with Jesus' suffering.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One was a painting and one was a sculpture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The icon functioned as an intercessor, believed to work miracles, whereas the <i>Röttgen Pietà</i> was a <i>vesperbild</i> used in conjunction with nighttime prayers and devotions.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Students should be encouraged to follow the order of the tasks as presented in the question. The questions are scaffolded to lead from entry-level tasks to more cognitively challenging tasks and also to have subsequent tasks build on previous tasks. Students will generally be more successful in answering the question if they follow the tasks in the order in which the question presents them.
- Students should be aware that the list of works provided with the question have been carefully selected to work well with the question. While students should absolutely consider using works off the list, they need to think through their answers very carefully to ensure that their chosen works will in fact work with the specific tasks addressed by the question.
- Teachers should practice comparison questions in class and should have students work on finding points of both similarity and difference between images. Students should focus on drawing true comparisons by discussing comparable features rather than providing parallel, separate discussions of two works.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The AP Art History course page on AP Central includes an online module titled *Writing About Art* that offers strategies to help students transform their analysis and interpretations of art into writing. https://cb.collegeboard.org/ap-training-modules/writing-about-art/story_html5.html
- Teachers will find sample student responses to exam questions on the exam information page on AP Central, along with specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned. Teachers can use these samples to work with students to help them become more comfortable in practicing and producing responses within the suggested response time, so that students devote an appropriate amount of time for each question. <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-art-history/exam>
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- The instructional section of the *AP Art History Course and Exam Description* offers another collection of resources for teachers that address each of the specific skills needed for the course. The section on pages 175–190 specifically addresses teaching the components of the AP Art History course and provides support, resources, and suggestions for instruction. <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/pdf/ap-art-history-course-and-exam-description.pdf?course=ap-art-history>

Question #2**Task:** Contextual Analysis**Topic:** West and Central Asia (500 B.C.E.–1980 C.E.) & South, East, and Southeast Asia (300 B.C.E.–1980 C.E.)**Max. Points:** 7**Mean Score:** 2.70***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

This question asked students to analyze a Buddhist architectural complex from West and Central Asia (500 B.C.E.–1980 C.E.) or South, East, and Southeast Asia (300 B.C.E.–1980 C.E.) in terms of how the work demonstrates visual traditions of a region. The question listed three options from the required course content that students could choose from, or they could select another relevant work from the specified content areas. The intent of the question was to have students demonstrate an ability to situate a work of architecture within a specific regional context and then to explain how features facilitate practices within that architectural space. Students had to use visual and contextual evidence to support the explanation.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- Responses generally explored (or discussed) appropriate choices, whether from the list of provided works or other appropriate works from the required course content. They were often able to provide two accurate identifiers to earn the identification point.
- Responses demonstrated an ability to describe a Buddhist architectural complex using specific visual evidence and were generally able to earn lower-level description points.
- Responses usually could explain how a feature of a Buddhist architectural complex functioned to facilitate Buddhist practice.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Responses struggled to explain how a feature of a complex was typical of visual traditions of a region.
- Responses often conflated or confused works and therefore introduced contradictory details and observations. In particular, responses often conflated or confused Sanchi with Borobudur, Longmen with Bamiyan, and Todai-ji with Ryoan-ji.
- Responses, in some cases, did not link a feature to a specific Buddhist practice, but instead veered off into a general discussion of Buddhist beliefs.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Stupa at Sanchi is a shrine that pilgrims enter to pray to the Buddha. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The circular path around the Stupa at Sanchi facilitates meditation as pilgrims circumambulate it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Buddha is shown at the Longmen caves because the caves are Buddhist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Buddha and attendants at the Fengxian Temple at the Longmen caves are part of a visual tradition of colossal rock-cut sculpture found along the Silk Road.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Students seemed less familiar with works from outside Europe and the United States. Teachers need to teach the global curriculum of the new course and should try to emphasize differences, traditions, and changes with works both within and across cultures.
- Students appear to be writing less for this second long question than for the first long question and even for some of the short questions. Teachers should remind students to devote the full suggested time to answering each long free-response question, as each of these long questions are worth more than the shorter free-response questions. Not devoting appropriate time means that students often do not answer tasks and therefore cannot earn full credit.
- Teachers should try to provide exercises and assessments designed to improve visual recall, so that students can accurately describe works of art that are not shown and avoid conflating related works.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The AP Art History course page on AP Central includes an online module titled *Writing About Art* that offers strategies to help students transform their analysis and interpretations of art into writing. https://cb.collegeboard.org/ap-training-modules/writing-about-art/story_html5.html
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Question #3**Task:** Artistic Intention**Topic:** Ancient Mediterranean (3500 B.C.E.–300 C.E.)**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 2.56***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

This question asked students to analyze the Forum of Trajan in terms of the practical and symbolic functions for which it was built and then to explain the role that the Column of Trajan played in the overall design of the forum. This is a work from Ancient Mediterranean (3500 B.C.E.–300 C.E.). The intent of the question was to give students the opportunity to use visual and contextual evidence to explain how a work of architecture is shaped by the artistic intent that led to its creation.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- The responses showed that students generally understood the difference between form, function, content, and context as aspects of artistic analysis, and they were able to discuss the artistic intentions behind the creation of a work of art.
- The responses showed that students were familiar with the work discussed and the broader historical and political context of the Ancient Mediterranean world.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Responses often did not correctly identify the symbolic function of the Forum of Trajan and the responses, in some cases, included historical inaccuracies.
- Responses showed that students were prepared to discuss the narrative and iconography of the Column of Trajan, which was not required by the question, but they were not always able to situate the column within the larger architectural context of the forum.
- Responses revealed misconceptions about the location of specific structures within the overall forum and a misreading of the reconstruction drawing provided.
- Many responses indicated the Forum of Trajan was exclusively a market as opposed to understanding that a market was one component of the overall complex and not the sole or primary practical function of the forum.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The symbolic function of the forum was to commemorate the Trojan war. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The forum primarily served to announce the power of Trajan and serve as propaganda for his rule.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Column of Trajan was a watchtower for the city. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trajan's column was at the end of the forum in a courtyard between the Greek and Roman libraries, the pinnacle of Trajan's triumph that could be seen throughout the forum.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The practical function of the forum was that it was a market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Forum of Trajan was built by Trajan as a Roman political center. It contained a basilica for political affairs and secular government meetings. The Forum served as a center for Roman life.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Make sure to have students consider the variety of ways that the term “context” can be used. In this case, students needed to bring to their response both an understanding of the historical context as well as the physical context of the Forum of Trajan.
- For works in the required course context with multiple views, make sure that students understand the relationship between the various views. The Forum of Trajan has four views. It appears that some students learned about the view of the Trajan markets without knowing how to place the markets within the overall design of the complex.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The AP Art History course page on AP Central includes an article titled *The Challenge of Architectural Meaning* that offers a discussion on how to engage art history students’ interest in architecture. <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-art-history/classroom-resources/challenge-architectural-meaning?course=ap-art-history>
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Question #4**Task:** Attribution**Topic:** Africa (1100–1980 C.E.)**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 1.50***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

This question asked students to attribute a presumably unknown work (a Baule portrait mask) to its correct culture by comparing it to a known work from the required course content: the portrait mask (*Mblo*) of Moya Yanso. This is a work from Africa (1100–1980 C.E.). The intent of the question was to have students apply their knowledge of the form, function, content, and context of the Baule portrait mask that they had studied to a presumably unknown but similar portrait mask from the same culture. Students were asked to justify their attribution using both visual and contextual evidence.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- In some cases, responses showed good familiarity with an African culture and its visual traditions, but not necessarily the relevant culture and tradition for this question.
- Better responses were able to address masking traditions within Baule society, applying both visual and contextual evidence from the portrait mask (*Mblo*) of Moya Yanso in the required course content to discuss how the mask shown might also have honored a specific known individual and been danced by a relative in a community celebration.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Many students clearly struggled with this question, due both to what was for many a less familiar content area (Africa) and with a difficult art historical skill (attribution). There were many blank responses for this question, suggesting that many students need greater mastery of the content area.
- Students frequently mixed up African cultures and were unable to attribute this object correctly to the Baule peoples. Students commonly misidentified the work as a *Pwo* mask or as a Sande Society mask. While these are both incorrect attributions, they do demonstrate some knowledge, as there are formal similarities between the *Mblo* mask and the *Pwo* mask, and both *Pwo* and Sande Society masks relate to a female context. Students who misattributed the work in this way could earn partial credit.
- Students often made generic statements about masking practices being related to religion and ritual, particularly fertility. This particular mask was used for secular entertainment and it is unique within the content area as being a mask that represents a specific, known individual.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a <i>Pwo</i> mask. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a <i>Mblo</i> mask made by the Baule peoples.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This mask was used in sacred rituals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This mask was used in secular ceremonies to celebrate an important individual in the community.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Attribution is a key art historical skill and should be practiced in classrooms. Students should work on attributing works to particular cultures as well as to particular artists, and should be able to articulate the reasons for their selection clearly and through making specific references to the illustrated work.
- Students and teachers should also be aware that attribution may be to a culture as well as to an artist, and should be able to situate unknown works of art into their cultural context through inference by relating it to a known work from the same culture.
- The African content area is clearly challenging for students and teachers. Teachers are encouraged to teach Africa as a varied place with numerous distinct visual traditions rather than as a monolithic entity. There are a number of African masks in the curriculum, and students should be able to draw distinctions as well as parallels between them.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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Question #5**Task:** Tradition and Change**Max. Points:** 5**Topic:** Later Europe and the Americas (1750-1980 C.E.)**Mean Score:** 3.04***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

This question asked students to analyze Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque* in terms of both traditions and changes in the representation of the female nude in European art. This is a work from Later Europe and the Americas (1750–1980 C.E.). The intent of the question was to give students the opportunity to use skills of visual and contextual analysis to explain how an artist — in this case, Ingres — responded to the changing cultural context at the time that the work was made.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- Responses were generally able to relate the work to the larger visual tradition of the reclining female nude, showing an awareness of this central tradition within European art. While not all responses were able to identify clearly how Ingres deviated from this visual tradition, they were often able to articulate how Ingres fit within this larger tradition. Many made comparisons to other relevant works in the required course content, such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, to support the explanation.
- Responses usually described at least two relevant visual characteristics of the figure shown. This is a baseline skill for art history.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- Students often confused Ingres' work with Manet's *Olympia*, and provided discussion that was accurate for Manet rather than Ingres. Students mistook the figure for a prostitute and discussed her disconcerting gaze and her confident demeanor, none of which are accurate for *La Grande Odalisque*.
- Students often did not provide accurate contextual evidence to explain why Ingres deviated from the visual tradition of the female nude. While some students were able to discuss the work in light of Orientalism, European colonialism, western conceptions of the harem and/or Ingres' own interest in Mannerism, many students were not able to do so.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The woman looks like the one in control. She has a sense of pride and sexual power. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work shows established visual traditions by showing the idealized, reclining nude with downcast eyes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ingres showed his work in the <i>Salon des Refuses</i>, which was where all the rejected art was exhibited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ingres was interested in Orientalism, which can be seen through his addition of "Oriental" motifs, such as her headdress, the peacock-feather fan, and the hookah.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- There are numerous examples of works that demonstrate both continuity and change within the required course content. Students should be encouraged to think of relationships between works of art that constitute visual traditions and work on articulating what those traditions are.
- Placing works of art within specific historical contexts is clearly challenging for students, who often seem to lack a sense of historical chronology. Timeline exercises may assist students in grasping chronology and in seeing how works relate to each other in time, both within and across cultures.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

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Question #6**Task:** Audience Response**Topic:** Global Contemporary (1980 C.E. to Present)**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 2.47***What were responses expected to demonstrate in their response to this question?***

This question asked students to analyze Kara Walker's *Darkytown Rebellion* in terms of how the artist used both form and content to elicit a response from the audience. This is a work from Global Contemporary (1980 C.E. to present). The intent of the question was to give students the opportunity to use skills of visual and contextual analysis to demonstrate an understanding of how an artist may purposefully manipulate form and content to elicit a response.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

- Responses showed a general familiarity with Kara Walker and her work. This suggested that students are much better equipped to discuss contemporary art than they were on the legacy exam. This is an encouraging development.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

- The question required students to describe both the form and the content of the work prior to explaining it. Students in some cases jumped straight to a discussion of meaning, without discussing form and content, and many students confused form and content in their responses.
- Students often included misinformation about the content of the work and linked the work to incorrect historical contexts.
- Students often had difficulty identifying an audience response and linking it to a particular aspect of the work.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work shows African American women performing the only kinds of work that were available to them, e.g., nannying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The content of the work shows purposefully ambiguous scenes of horror, possibly from a slave revolt, with both slaves and slave owners shown.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The soft, Disney-like lighting makes the audience feel happy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When viewers walk in front of the light projector, their shadows become characters in the work. This is intended to be disorienting and to make viewers question their perceptions about race.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer to teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

- Student responses that included misinformation about the content of the work often seemed to be relying on an unreliable internet source that unfortunately appears high on internet searches for this work. Students should be taught how to evaluate internet sources and should be encouraged to use unfamiliar resources with care.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- Teachers will find sample student responses to exam questions on the exam information page on AP Central, along with specific commentary explaining why each point was or was not earned. Teachers can use these samples to work with students to help them become more comfortable in practicing and producing responses within the suggested response time, so that students devote an appropriate amount of time for each question. <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-art-history/exam>
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