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# AP Art History

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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**Question 3**

The work shown is *The Court of Gayumars*, a folio from Shah Tahmasp’s *Shahnama*, created c. 1522–1525 C.E.

Describe the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Describe at least two visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Using specific contextual evidence, explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function.

Using specific visual evidence, explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*.

**Scoring Criteria**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Points</b>
<b>1</b> Accurately describes the subject matter of <i>The Court of Gayumars</i> .	1 point
<b>2</b> Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of <i>The Court of Gayumars</i> .	1 point
<b>3</b> Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of <i>The Court of Gayumars</i> .	1 point
<b>4</b> Accurately uses specific contextual evidence to explain how a <i>Shahnama</i> was intended to function.	1 point
<b>5</b> Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the subject matter OR visual characteristics of <i>The Court of the Gayumars</i> reinforce the function of a <i>Shahnama</i> .	1 point
<b>Total Possible Score</b>	<b>5 points</b>

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### Question 3 (continued)

#### **Scoring Information**

#### ***Describe the subject matter of The Court of Gayumars.***

*The Court of Gayumars* depicts a scene from Firdawsi's epic poem the *Shahnama* (*Book of Kings*), written between the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. Composed of more than 50,000 couplets, the *Shahnama* recounts the history and lore of the ancient kings of Persia from their mythic beginnings until the Arab conquest in 651 C.E.

In this particular scene, attributed to the painter Sultan Muhammad, the central figure is Gayumars, the legendary first king of Persia. Gayumars sits above his court in the mountaintop kingdom from which he ruled. The scene is populated with wild animals, which were said to become docile and civilized in his presence. Gayumars was a generous ruler who, according to legend, taught his followers to cook and to clothe themselves in leopard pelts, which they wear in this image. The courtiers encircled below the king demonstrate the idyllic and peaceful character of Gayumars's kingship, in which humans lived in harmony with nature.

Between Gayumars and his court are his son Siyamak and his grandson Hushang. The angel Soroush has warned Gayumars of Ahriman's intentions of a battle between their sons, and Gayumars is regretting the parting to come as his son will soon be slain by the Black Div (demon). Hushang later avenges his father's death by slaying the Black Div.

#### ***Describe at least two visual characteristics of The Court of Gayumars.***

This particular folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama* is made of ink, watercolor, and gold on fine paper measuring 18 ½ inches tall. The folio incorporates an off-center, rectangular ruled border and a central illumination. Framed calligraphic script called *nasta'liq* found at the top and bottom of the illumination describes the sun shining down to "rejuvenate" all living things and Gayumars becoming "King of the World." The text tells of the people wearing leopard pelts and of the prosperity of Gayumars's reign. Elements of the painted landscape such as the foliage extend beyond the illumination's border into the gold-flecked margins.

The illumination has a circular, hierarchical composition with Gayumars placed at the apex of the vertically oriented mountainside paradise. Seated in a cross-legged position, he looks almost as if he is floating above his court. Gayumars's son and grandson are depicted at slightly lower levels, with one returning the king's tender gaze. Members of the court wearing leopard pelts, as well as animals and various spirits, are depicted in a semicircle near the bottom edge of the composition.

Reflecting a blend of styles from artists working in the Persian court, *The Court of the Gayumars* includes a logically organized background with a flat gold sky. Overlapping figures establish a sense of depth. Although much of the space is portrayed in a relatively flat manner, the court members are individualized and subtly modeled. Plants in the central garden are carefully delineated, but beyond this area much of the vegetation grows unchecked, merging with the mountainside. Dynamic rock formations and wild foliage expressed in lavish color alternatively conceal and reveal animated, grotesque faces within the crags.

Chinese-influenced elements are also included in this illumination. Twisting tree branches bloom with stylized flowers. Patterned clouds painted in blues and grays recall traditional Chinese motifs.

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### Question 3 (continued)

**Using specific contextual evidence, explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function.**

A *Shahnama* is a manuscript intended for secular use. As a *Book of Kings*, a *Shahnama* recounts stories of virtuous kings and a model of conduct for rulers to follow. In the genre of a “mirror for princes,” a *Shahnama* was meant to extol the virtues of ruling with justice and loyalty. Thus, at its most basic level, a *Shahnama* functioned as a guide for just and benevolent rule. It is a compendium of Persian stories intended for the education of kings and princes.

Shah Tahmasp’s *Shahnama* was originally commissioned by his father, Shah Isma’il I, and completed about 20 years later during a period of dynastic change. This patronage of a lavishly illustrated copy of a *Shahnama* can therefore be interpreted as legitimizing their reign by connecting a relatively new state to the mythic beginnings of Persian history and fabled rulers such as Gayumars. This parallel is all the more apparent given Firdawsi’s dedication of the original *Shahnama* to the ruler Mahmud of Ghazna, a king who had succeeded in gaining power over competing territories by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. For Firdawsi, Mahmud of Ghazna appeared to be positioned to end dynastic strife and unify the region: a similarity that would not have been lost on Shah Tahmasp and his father.

The commissioning of a *Shahnama* also served an important courtly purpose. Lavish manuscripts such as copies of the *Shahnama* were a central part of Safavid artistic patronage. Apprenticed in calligraphy and drawing, Shah Tahmasp was a devoted and knowledgeable patron, who combined his education from the city of Herat with the local capital culture when he moved back to Tabriz. Commissioning a *Shahnama* served to demonstrate his commitment to Persian literary culture; it would also have showcased his wealth and status. An extravagant court production, a *Shahnama* was viewed only on special occasions during which an elite audience could leisurely appreciate the sumptuous materials and fine details, as well as the good taste of the manuscript’s patron.

**Using specific visual evidence, explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*.**

In terms of subject matter, the depiction of the Gayumars’s benevolence and the prosperity of his reign provided a moral example for the education of young Shah Tahmasp, who inherited his father’s throne at age 10 and who oversaw the completion of this commission of a *Shahnama*. Shah Tahmasp may also have understood the inclusion of Gayumars’s son and grandson as significant. Shah Tahmasp may have seen a parallel between himself and the legendary prince Hushang, as both young men were slated to assume roles as political and cultural leaders after their fathers.

Visual characteristics of the illumination reiterate themes of dynastic authority. The use of hierarchical scale and the placement of Gayumars at the apex of the composition reinforce the authority of the shah and of dynastic relationships generally. Gayumars’s placement in the compositional hierarchy, atop the circle of humans and animals, gives him significance as a leader.

Though Gayumars is the central point of this illumination, Persian painting tradition allows for multiple centers of interest. Viewers’ eyes are meant to explore freely, roaming over the different colors and shapes, moving from one visual element to the next. Such personal exploration was intended to be part of the delight of the elite experience of viewing the manuscript, in its function as demonstrating the wealth and power of the patron as well as his refinement and commitment to Persian literary culture. The sumptuous materials, meanwhile, made the manuscript appropriate for royalty.

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### Question 3 (continued)

#### Scoring Notes

<b>1</b>	<p><b>Accurately describes the subject matter of <i>The Court of Gayumars</i>.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depicts <b>the legendary first king of Persia, flanked by his son and grandson.</b></li> <li>• Depicts a scene from Firdawsi’s <b>epic poem</b> the <i>Shahnama</i>, which recounts <b>the history and lore of the ancient kings of Persia from their mythic beginnings until the Arab conquest.</b></li> <li>• Gayumars <b>sits above his court in his mountaintop kingdom, peacefully ruling over humans and animals.</b></li> <li>• Depicts the <b>king gazing tearfully</b> with the <b>recent knowledge from the angel Soroush that his heir will die.</b></li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of <i>The Court of Gayumars</i>.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporates an <b>off-center, rectangular ruled border</b> enclosing a central illumination. <b>Some elements extend beyond the border</b> into the gold-flecked margins.</li> <li>• Framed <b>calligraphic script is found at the top and bottom.</b></li> <li>• Has a <b>circular, hierarchical composition with Gayumars at the apex.</b> Seated in a cross-legged position, he <b>looks almost as if he is floating</b> above his court. Gayumars’s <b>son and grandson are at slightly lower levels.</b></li> <li>• <b>Chinese-influenced elements: e.g., twisting tree branches bloom with stylized flowers and patterned clouds.</b></li> <li>• A <b>blend of Persian painting traditions:</b> e.g., includes a logically organized background with a flat gold sky. <b>Overlapping figures</b> establish a sense of depth. <b>Faces</b> of the court members <b>are individualized, with almost no modeling.</b> Dynamic rock formations in <b>lavish color</b> alternatively conceal and reveal faces <b>and animals.</b></li> <li>• Courtiers <b>dressed in leopard pelts,</b> as well as animals and spirits, <b>are in a semicircle near the bottom.</b></li> <li>• Made of <b>ink, watercolor, and gold</b> on fine paper.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of <i>The Court of Gayumars</i>.</b></p> <p>See above.</p>
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Accurately uses specific contextual evidence to explain how a <i>Shahnama</i> was intended to function.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A <b><i>Book of Kings</i>, a <i>Shahnama</i> functioned as a guide for just and benevolent rule.</b></li> <li>• A <i>Shahnama</i> is a <b>compendium of Persian stories intended for education of the court and royal family.</b></li> <li>• The specific <b>patronage</b> of this <i>Shahnama</i> by Shah Tahmasp and his father <b>served to legitimize their reign</b> by connecting their relatively new state to the mythic beginnings of Persian history.</li> <li>• Also a <b>courtly purpose:</b> commissioning a <i>Shahnama</i> served to demonstrate Shah Tahmasp’s <b>commitment to Persian literary culture</b> and would have <b>showcased his wealth and status</b> during <b>elite viewing opportunities.</b></li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<p><b>Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the subject matter OR visual characteristics of <i>The Court of Gayumars</i> reinforce the function of a <i>Shahnama</i>.</b></p> <p><b>Subject matter:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The depiction of <b>Gayumars’s benevolence and prosperity provided a moral example of just rule.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Visual characteristics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The courtiers encircled below the king demonstrate the <b>idyllic and peaceful character of Gayumars’s kingship,</b> in which <b>humans lived in harmony with nature.</b></li> <li>• <b>Compositional elements reiterate themes of dynastic authority: e.g., hierarchical scale</b> and the <b>placement of Gayumars at the apex</b> of the composition underscores his <b>significance as a leader.</b></li> <li>• The <b>sumptuous materials made the manuscript appropriate for royalty.</b></li> </ul>

3. Suggested time: 15 minutes.

The work shown is *The Court of Gayumars*, a folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*, created c. 1522–1525 C.E.

Describe the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Describe at least two visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Using specific contextual evidence, explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function.

Using specific visual evidence, explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*.

~~The Court of Gayumars depicts the first <sup>mythical</sup> Shah of Persia ~~in a beautiful and magical landscape. The Court of Gayumars places the Shah at the center of the composition and he is much larger than the other figures, suggesting~~~~

The Court of the Gayumars depicts the Persian creation myth and the first people of Persia. In the creation myth the first people were said to have been created in the form of skin which not only adorns the figures bodies but is also referenced in the spotted pattern of the garden. The creation myth also speaks about the lush landscape of the Paradise that the first Persians inhabited. This paradise like setting somewhat contributes to the purpose of the *Shahnama* which was to educate Shahs in the history, both mythical and real, of Persia. Because it was for the king the *Shahnama* also placed great importance on depicting the king as a powerful ruler and Persia as a strong nation. The setting of this image is in a kind of paradise to reflect that Persia itself is a paradise like the Paradise that the Muslim Persians believed that they would enter in the afterlife. ~~This was a powerful association because it placed Shahs in a divine position.~~ The idea

that the landscape of Persia was almost as beautiful as  
Athens' creator would have sparked great national pride in the  
king and encouraged him to defend his worldly paradise at all costs.

The Court of the Gayumars also reinforced the power of the Sha  
as evidenced by the placement of the first Sha in the center of the  
image. Additionally he is larger than the other figures which shows  
hierarchy of scale.

This hierarchy of scale and the figures central  
placement identify him as a central authority and these force  
comments the position of the king as a central authority. The Court  
to the Gayumars was used to instill a sense of pride and authority  
in the Persian king who studied it.

3. Suggested time: 15 minutes.

The work shown is *The Court of Gayumars*, a folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*, created c. 1522–1525 C.E.

Describe the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Describe at least two visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Using specific contextual evidence, explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function.

Using specific visual evidence, explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*.

The Court of Gayumars depicts a Gayumar King surrounded by his family and court. It provides a visual to show an ancient king & his court. The King or Emperor is in the center, high on a mountain or cloud. Below him but still elevated are his son and grandson, followed by courtseans. While above is ancestors or deities. The Court of Gayumars shows a sense of depth by including overlapping bodies of the courtseans. Also features atmospheric perspective with its hazy depiction of the mountains below the royalty. The figures are also depicted in various positions from profile, to frontal, to three quarter view. Finally the painting is settled between sections of text in Arabic, above & below.

The *Shahnama* was originally intended to tell the stories of historical figures as well as legends associated with them. Later, the book would become an example of historical epics associated with modern Iran or Iraq. The function was also meant to show a written story accompanied by illustrations. By reading the text, then viewing the painting, then continue reading the story, reinforces the story being told. Also the circular composition of the image along with the



placement hierarchy tells the viewer the meaning of the story.

3. Suggested time: 15 minutes.

The work shown is *The Court of Gayumars*, a folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*, created c. 1522–1525 C.E.

Describe the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Describe at least two visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars*.

Using specific contextual evidence, explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function.

Using specific visual evidence, explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*.

The court of Gayumars depicts a very naturalistic landscape that is balanced on both sides by an outcropping of trees, flowing streams, and animals. The folio uses exclusively natural tones that allude to the images' themes of ~~bring out the images references~~ harmony and environment. The men and women gathered around the tree in the center of the work turn their heads upwards toward a figure seated high above them. This man represents their King who, from his expression, looks upon his subjects ~~are~~ with benevolence. They honor him as a guiding figure and their leader.

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## 2018 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 3

#### Overview

This question asked students to describe the subject matter and visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars*, which is a folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*. Students then needed to explain the function of a *Shahnama* and explain how either the subject matter or the visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*. This is a work from West and Central Asia (500 B.C.E.–1980 C.E.). The intent of the question was to give students the opportunity to use specific visual and contextual evidence to explain how a work of art reflects the intention behind its creation.

#### Sample: 3A

Score: 5

#### Task 1: Accurately describes the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)

The response describes the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars* as showing “the Persian creation myth and the first people of Persia.”

#### Task 2: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)

The response describes one visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*: The people are “clothed in leopard skin,” which is “not only adorn[in]g the figures bodies but is also referenced in the spotted pattern of the border.”

#### Task 3: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)

The response describes another visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*: The work shows “the lush landscape of the Paradise that the first Persians inhabited.”

#### Task 4: Accurately uses specific contextual evidence to explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function. (1 point)

The response uses specific contextual evidence to explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function by explaining that it was used to “educate Shas [sic] in the history, both mythical and real, of Persia.” The response further explains that the work “was used to instill a sense of pride and authority in the Persian King who studied it.”

#### Task 5: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the subject matter OR visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*. (1 point)

The response uses specific visual evidence to explain how the visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama* by describing how the work “reinforced the power of the Sha [sic] as evidenced by the placement of the first Sha [sic] in the center of the image.” The response further explains that Gayumars is depicted “larger than the other figures” and his “central placement” highlights his position as “a central authority.” The response notes, “Because it was for the king the *Shahnama* also placed great importance on depicting the king as a powerful ruler and Persia as a strong nation.”

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### Question 3 (continued)

**Sample: 3B**

**Score: 4**

**Task 1: Accurately describes the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)**

The response describes the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars* as showing “a Gayumar King surrounded by his family and court,” then goes on to describe “an ancient king + his court.” The response also includes the king is “in the center, high on a mountain or cloud. Below him but still elevated are his son and grandson.” While not required to earn the point, the additional description enhances the quality of the response.

**Task 2: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)**

The response describes one visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*: The work “shows a sense of depth by including overlapping bodies” of the courtiers. The response adds that “The figures are also depicted in various positions from profile, to frontal, to three quarter view.” Although the response misidentifies the type of perspective used as atmospheric, this error does not detract from the overall quality of the response.

**Task 3: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)**

The response describes another visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*: “the painting is settled between sections of text ... above + below.”

**Task 4: Accurately uses specific contextual evidence to explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function. (1 point)**

The response uses specific contextual evidence to explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function by stating that “The Shahnama was originally intended to tell the stories of historical figures as well as legends associated with them.” The response further observes that “Later, the book would become an example [*sic*] of historical epics associated with modern Iran or Iraq.” While not required to earn the point, the additional evidence enhances the quality of the response.

**Task 5: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the subject matter OR visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*. (0 points)**

No point was earned. The response does not use specific visual evidence to explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*. The response makes an attempt with the statement, “the circular composition of the Image along with the placement hierarchy tells the viewer the meaning of the story.” However, this statement is not clearly connected to the function of a *Shahnama* as a “Book of Kings.” To earn the point the response could have connected visual evidence, such as the central placement of Gayumars, to the desirable qualities of a strong ruler.

**Sample: 3C**

**Score: 2**

**Task 1: Accurately describes the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*. (0 points)**

No point was earned. The response does not describe the subject matter of *The Court of Gayumars*. The response makes an attempt by referencing a “king.” However, given that the title of the work includes the

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**Question 3 (continued)**

word “court,” the word “king” alone is insufficient. To earn the point the response needed to provide more specific information about Gayumars as the first king of Persia. The response could also have referenced the presence of Gayumars’s son, grandson, courtiers, or the animals that reportedly became peaceable in his presence.

**Task 2: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)**

The response describes one visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*: The work “depicts a very naturalistic landscape that is balanced on both sides by an outcropping of trees, flowing streams, and animals.”

**Task 3: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*. (1 point)**

The response describes another visual characteristic of *The Court of Gayumars*: “men and women [are] gathered around the tree in the center of the work.” They “turn their heads upwards towards a figure seated high above them. This man represents their king who, from his expression, looks upon his subjects with benevolence [*sic*]. They honor him as a guiding figure and their leader.” While not required to earn the point, the additional evidence enhances the quality of the response.

**Task 4: Accurately uses specific contextual evidence to explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function. (0 points)**

No point was earned. The response does not use specific contextual evidence to explain how a *Shahnama* was intended to function. To earn the point the response needed to explain how a *Shahnama* was created to be used for the education of Persianate kings.

**Task 5: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the subject matter OR visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*. (0 points)**

No point was earned. The response does not use specific visual evidence to explain how the subject matter or visual characteristics of *The Court of Gayumars* reinforce the function of a *Shahnama*. To earn the point the response could have connected the depiction of Gayumars’s tranquil and benevolent rule to the desirable qualities of a ruler that are conveyed in a *Shahnama*.