



## **AP<sup>®</sup> English Literature and Composition 2005 Scoring Commentary**

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**Question 1**

**Overview**

Students were asked to read carefully two poems titled “The Chimney Sweeper,” written by William Blake, about the condition of chimney sweeps in the late eighteenth century: the first poem was from “Songs of Innocence” (1789) and the second from “Songs of Experience” (1794). They were then asked to write an essay in which they compared and contrasted the two poems, taking into consideration the poetic techniques Blake uses in each. The intent of this question was to test students’ reading, analytical, and interpretative skills by presenting them with two challenging, rich poems. To answer the question successfully, students needed to have a firm grasp of the language and techniques employed by poets and then to arrive at an analytical and defensible reading of the essential meanings of both poems—a task that required a high level of critical thinking. The challenge of comparing and contrasting two Blake poems required the kind of thinking and writing common in the university literature classroom and served as a good discriminator of the students’ abilities to read, comprehend, and write intelligently about complex and suggestive texts.

**Sample: 1A**  
**Score: 8**

This is a clever essay that works quite well. There is a full introductory paragraph that is characterized by interesting, fluid writing. The student makes an astute observation about Blake’s use of the ampersand, suggesting that Blake intends to “show readers that he has working class sensibilities, in contrast to the aristocratic tastes of many of his contemporaries,” and then the student cleverly adopts the use to suggest sympathy with Blake. The essay also argues that using the “unabashedly sentimental ‘weep! ‘weep!’” appeals to our sense of justice. The following paragraph describes differences between the poems and stresses how the second poem tells the truth of chimney sweeping as Blake sees it, criticizing “the church, which attempts to hide these conditions, & the political establishment, which takes money, & reinvests none of it into the working class.” There is no concluding paragraph, as such, but in holistic scoring, the essay is not penalized for lacking a conclusion if it is otherwise developed. Though this is a somewhat short essay, it is an 8—though a low 8—because it provides a convincing interpretation of both poems and makes apt and specific references to the two poems.

**Sample: 1B**  
**Score: 6**

This essay focuses on imagery in its discussion of poetic technique. The student reads the imagery well and writes about it effectively, noting how the connotations between light and dark and black and white are used extensively by the poet. For example, the student points out that the children’s job of crawling into the black “chimneys may be seen as a metaphor for their own death.” Similarly, in the second poem, the description of the sweep as a “little black thing amoung [*sic*] the snow” establishes the “corrupting of the child, brought out by the snow.” The discussion of rhyme, however, is perfunctory. While the overall approach to the analysis of the two poems is somewhat mechanical, the analysis tends to get stronger as it proceeds, and the discussion of the two sweeps’ differing relationship to God—one as protective, the other exploitative—is soundly handled. Finally, the conclusion attempts to move one step beyond what has been discussed, suggesting “the importance of such activism in poetry” to expose the “many problems society faces.”

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**Question 1 (continued)**

**Sample: 1C**

**Score: 4**

This essay begins with a focus on the similarities and differences between the two chimney sweeper poems. The introductory paragraph is well written, though it is not able to distinguish the irony of the final verse of the first poem, asserting that the first ends with a “hopeful tone,” while the second ends with a “hopeless tone.” The analysis then focuses primarily on how God plays a central role in each poem, though the development is ultimately inadequate, with few direct references to the poems themselves. The next two paragraphs, both rather short, end up being repeated by the body paragraph, where the student reemphasizes how God gives the boy hope to carry on in the first poem, but how the worship of God in the second poem merely demonstrates the hypocrisy of the parents. There is no real mention of poetic techniques, and thus the analysis is finally incomplete and unconvincing.

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**Question 2**

**Overview**

Students were asked to read the complete text of a short story, “Birthday Party,” written in 1946 by Katharine Brush, and then to write an essay in which they explained how the author uses literary devices to achieve her purpose. The intent of the question was to test the students’ abilities to read prose texts closely and to demonstrate their interpretative skills. The passage was unusually accessible to most students, but the directness and explicitness of the passage did not challenge the best students to perform at the highest levels.

**Sample: 2A**

**Score: 8**

This essay first connects Brush’s authorial design with the creation of a “dismal atmosphere and somber mood” and concludes with “pointing out the depressing nature of man’s lack of interest in every-day [*sic*], ordinary people.” While it is possible to be momentarily distracted by the student’s references to “good diction” and “abrupt syntax,” most of the essay relies upon far more incisive analyses that make a strong case for the student’s interpretation of the story. For example, the student observes that Brush is “dryly assertive” in her observations of the couple and “somewhat deceptive in her opening paragraph,” as she “uses delightful imagery to symbolize” the outward contentment of the couple, which is destroyed as the event proceeds. The “pattering” of applause implies that “the speaker seems to be the only interested observer of these two nameless people.” The student aptly comments on how Brush’s repeated use of “you” and “and” “accelerates the shift in mood” in the second half of the story and places the reader “in a state of increasing dismay and deepening curiosity” to see how this episode will resolve itself. Finally, the student points out that Brush’s use of “alliteration of harsh sounds”—“quick, and curt and unkind”—emphasizes “the harsh nature of the man’s chastisement” of his wife. These observations are all probing and perceptive. More effective control of language would have allowed this essay to receive a 9.

**Sample: 2B**

**Score: 6**

This reasonable analysis of the passage directs attention to three literary techniques: point of view, irony, and diction. The student is quite good at discussing irony, pointing out how the little surprise the wife has planned “is still too big for the husband’s liking,” and how the oversized hat she wears “is still not enough to hide her from the grim reality of her unhappy relationship with her husband.” The analysis that follows these insights emphasizes how the reader comes to understand the hurtful relationship the two share. In discussing point of view, the student catches how the shift in pronoun to the informal “you” helps readers share the same pain that the wife experiences, but the student is unable to articulate this understanding fully. Overall, this essay starts out very promisingly but becomes less specific and persuasive as it progresses.

**Sample: 2C**

**Score: 4**

Circular and repetitive, this response is not wrong—just limited in scope. Almost the entire analysis circles back on the same issue of “sympathy” from the reader, a term that is repeated in one form or another numerous times. Unfortunately, repetition does not equal development, and the essay would be stronger if it attempted to provide textual evidence to support its claims. The student does try to address the question of

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**Question 2 (continued)**

the husband's response to his wife, remarking "that the man is acting horribly to this poor, shy woman who is only trying to please him," but again provides little understanding of the literary elements needed to develop or support the claims being made. A better essay would be less one-dimensional, perhaps exploring a further purpose for this evocation of sympathy.

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**Question 3**

**Overview**

The prompt for Question 3, the “open” question, began with a quotation from Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening* (1899), in which the protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess “that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.” Students were then asked to identify in a novel or play that they had studied a character who conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly and to analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning of the work. Readers found that students responded positively to the admonition to draw on material they had studied. Moreover, most students understood that the prompt required that the tension between outward conformity and inward questioning be the crux of their discussion. Thus, the inherent tension in the character helped students to organize their ideas and to extend the discussion to a consideration of the meaning of the work. Because AP students read a variety of texts with characters who struggle with the complexities of human existence, they had ample titles to choose from and were not forced to distort less appropriate texts to fit the prompt.

**Sample: 3A**

**Score: 8**

This insightful, logical analysis of *The Scarlet Letter* begins with an excellent thesis that demonstrates the writer’s ability to respond appropriately to the prompt: “Dimmesdale’s tension between outward conformity and inward questioning lead to the novel’s message that although one might appear guiltless, all of humanity must confront its inevitable sins or be driven insane by them.” The essay then uses the scaffold scenes as an appropriate organizing principle to develop the student’s argument. The student rightly asserts that because Dimmesdale “is hailed as the paragon of righteousness and faith since he is a minister, admission of sin would shatter the dogmatic puritan [*sic*] views of God and Dimmesdale if the town should suspect that their mouthpiece from God has sinned.” Though some paragraphs are a bit disorganized, moving too quickly from one point to the next, overall the writing is quite sophisticated, with long sentences that are nicely balanced and precisely detailed. For example, the student aptly notes that “when Dimmesdale states that he will not recognize Pearl as his illegitimate child in public, he shrinks from self-acceptance and chooses the safety of conformity over the harshness of reality.” The essay, coherent and precise, demonstrates significant insight and understanding.

**Sample: 3B**

**Score: 6**

This interpretation of *A Doll’s House* provides a competent analysis of the play, though it is less sophisticated in substance and style than an essay scored a 7. It begins with a strong thesis that asserts that Nora, on the one hand, wants to be the perfect, submissive wife, and yet, on the other hand, desires “independant [*sic*] thought and action, self-actualization and awareness, and an identity separate from her husband.” The second paragraph develops this notion well, pointing out her submissiveness and acceptance of pet names, along with her expectation that Torvald will protect her from the forgery on the loan she takes out. At the same time, the student notes that Nora asserts her right to protect those she loves and to leave her husband when the conformity he demands collides with “her right to be her own person.” Some infelicities in language, including a tendency to begin many sentences with “She,” weaken the response stylistically, and the long conclusion tends to move a bit too far toward discussing Ibsen’s influence on the women’s rights movement, rather than effectively responding to the prompt and concluding the essay.

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**Question 3 (continued)**

**Sample: 3C**

**Score: 4**

This interpretation of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* tends toward a retelling of the novel, rather than an analysis of how the character of Janie is someone who conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly. The student demonstrates a simplified understanding of the novel and spends so much time in discussing the earlier portions that there is not sufficient time left to explain how Janie’s last relationship, with Tea Cake, helps her discover what she has been yearning for from her very first marriage, and how that “real love” contributes to the meaning of the work. The conclusion does not move beyond what has already been discussed and merely repeats the prompt—to no purpose. Overall, this student’s claims are unpersuasive because they rely upon unsupported assertions.