



AP[®] English Literature 2004 Scoring Commentary Form B

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AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE
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Question 1
Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*

Sample: F

Score: 9

An excellent introduction begins this complex, richly detailed analysis. Its well-developed paragraphs and observant sentences are indicative of a controlled argument. The writer also provides some deft transitions (e.g., “The extent to which the rich separate themselves from the less fortunate is not limited to the material comforts and social hierarchy . . . ” and “Speaking of eating . . . ”). The thinking behind the writing is clearly resourceful and skilled, as when the writer says, “Although Gaskell is seemingly objective on the matter, one may guess from the portrayal of the Carsons as petty, rich snobs without regard to their servants’ well-being . . . who amuse themselves by quarreling over who has the worst headache when beggars roam forsaken streets, that her sympathies lie primarily with George Wilson . . . ” A primary marker of this essay is the extent to which the writer controls language and reasoning, even offering a sense of voice that is quite refreshing: “Oh but indeed, Thomas, they can when their mistress is the one giving orders, and Mrs. Carson does not waste any time before giving more.”

Sample: I

Score: 7

The essay presents a clear, vigorous, and well-controlled analysis, although it is not so fully detailed as the higher-level examples are. The writer does make several shrewd interpretations, such as referring to the “socially defined geographic organization of Manchester.” And when Gaskell describes Mr. Carson’s house as being “almost in the country,” the writer astutely comments, “Mr. Carson’s house is far from the pollution of the mills or the poverty of the working neighborhoods, and this is a concrete symbol of status.” Observations are also well connected with Gaskell’s literary devices, despite an occasional lack of substantiation. This essay exemplifies how successful a short, pithy, but critically adept essay can be; only a lack of development places it in the second tier of the scoring range.

Sample: D

Score: 5

Although the writer handles the central issue of the prompt fairly well, the essay lacks depth and complexity. The methodical organization it displays (e.g., “Firstly,” “also,” etc.), as well as its abundant details, cannot disguise weak writing and a level of articulation that are not up to the task, as in “These two sentences contrast with each other” or “One feels bad for the maids that they should have to wait on someone in such a way.” The essay is noticeably formulaic and uninspired, but not actually incorrect in its interpretation.

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**Question 2
Mary Oliver's "Crossing the Swamp"**

Sample: LL

Score: 8

The writer has a fine sense of the poem's formal, structural elements, although s/he does not at first make sufficient connections with the purpose behind them. However, the essay does contain many complex and interesting sentences that demonstrate admirable control over both language and argument: "The speaker addresses the physical experience of his struggle after establishing the image of his surroundings: 'My bones knock together at the pale joints' suggests that he is weary down to the very bones, and that he has been struggling for some length of time . . ." There are occasional lapses (e.g., "longer lines yet experience enjambment") and mistaken inferences (e.g., "tone of disgust"), but the essay is full of first-rate insights and builds to a conclusion that goes beyond mere repetition.

Sample: AA

Score: 6

The writer recognizes the power of the swamp, its "unlimited potential." Although the writer fails to understand the stick metaphor and some words like "peerless" are taken to be negative, there is good attention to imagery and diction and a generally acceptable view of the poem's essential idea—struggling through life's journey: "The work is a beautiful example of the tale of a man who has lived life fully, and ended it richly, though through great toil and hardship." This essay provides a reading that, although somewhat lacking in imagination, is reasonable and competent in its discussion.

Sample: BB

Score: 3

Weak writing (e.g., "it [the swamp] acquiesces its control to smaller things such as the narrator of the poem") and inept interpretation (e.g., the swamp "realizes that the narrator is just trying to survive" although "They both want the same thing") doom this essay to the lower ranges. The writer does mention personification and alliteration, however, and recognizes the central issue of the swamp's power, saving the essay from a 2.

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Question 3
Death Scenes

Sample: OOO
Score: 9

This analysis gives a perfectly controlled discussion of the death scene in *King Lear*, when Lear's eyes are opened at last and Cordelia is dying in his arms. The writer is adept in discussing both Lear's experience and the larger implications of the play. There are also excellent uses of very specific examples, substantiated quotations, and authoritative recollections of plot details. An organizational strength of the essay is that it is structured according to the development of the writer's ideas, rather than by the chronological events in Shakespeare's tragedy. The writer's discussion is notable for its resourceful, interesting, and richly-developed sentences: "In Cordelia's death, Lear is physically reminded of his previous blindness, a central theme in the greater meaning of the work . . . That her death was so meaningless, and that Lear was saved, suggests a cruel fate and suffering in the world, in addition to the obvious injustice . . . The tragic consequences of Lear's blindness and his daughters' treachery make his and Cordelia's deaths inescapable."

Sample: KKK
Score: 7

The events (protest, flagellation) leading up to John's suicide in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* are the focus of this essay. In a well-detailed analysis, the writer presents a persuasive exploration of that death, connecting it to "Huxley's belief" that "a 'perfect' world is not worth the sacrifices it demands." There is some imbalance caused by overemphasizing the scenes preceding the suicide, and the writer does not sufficiently develop the implications of John's death. Control over language falters too frequently for this essay to score at a higher level, but the writer grasps the central point of the novel, that "*Brave New World* is meant as a warning against what society may become."

Sample: GGG
Score: 5

The writer selects an appropriate death scene—Dimmesdale's in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*—but might have done more with this choice, especially with what Dimmesdale says or what others do. The writing is thoroughly adequate, if a bit moralistic: "One of my favorite pieces of Romantic fiction, *The Scarlet Letter*, is about being true to oneself, which is a lesson sorely needed in these days." The explanation of Dimmesdale's death is superficial and muddled at best but shows a workmanlike approach to the novel. Often lacking complexity, the essay still reveals a writer in control of his or her ideas: "Had he lived and not confessed, or had he run away with Hester as he suggested, not only would the reader probably be disappointed, but the theme would never be truly revealed . . . While sad, [death] has been, and probably always will be, an effective way to get your point across."