



## **AP® English Literature 2004 Scoring Commentary**

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**Question 1**

**Emily Dickinson's "We grow accustomed to the Dark" and  
Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night"**

**Sample: JJ**

**Score: 8**

From its initial paragraph, this essay shows a candidate in control of both language and argument: "Though these two poems by Dickinson and Frost share the element of dark or night, the poets speak from very different perspectives. Dickinson's 'Darkness' connotes uncertainty and change, while the speaker of Frost's poem imbues night with a far more negative and desolate meaning." The writer is clearly a good reader who sees the implications of the poetic line, as in this explanation of Dickinson's characteristic punctuation: "The pauses created by the interrupting dashes in Dickinson's poem create a feeling of tentativeness and suggest the hesitancy experienced by those who are left in the 'Dark' to find their own paths." Although we wish the essay were developed more fully—particularly in its discussion of the Frost poem—the syntactic variety and critical thinking evident here are indicative of a sophisticated writer.

**Sample: T**

**Score: 6**

This upper-half analysis, though flawed by unsophisticated, almost linear writing, contains numerous flashes of insight, including this explanation of the sense of the speaker's isolation in the Frost poem: "Indeed, the only one Frost becomes 'acquainted with' is the night." There is a balanced discussion of both poems, with the essay almost equally divided between an examination of Dickinson and of Frost. Unfortunately, the writer never plumbs the full implications of the poetic devices detailed so well. The essay does illustrate what a capable writer of more than average critical abilities can do with comparison and contrast and ends on a nicely differentiated explanation of the nuances of "accustomed" and "acquainted."

**Sample: Q**

**Score: 3**

The writer obviously feels comfortable using suitable language for discussing poetry, including notations on caesura and symbolism. Less successful, however, is the discussion of the underlying themes both poets explore by means of these devices. The brevity of the essay does not allow for a full discussion of either poem, despite the many citations the writer gives. Language, too, is truncated or even convoluted, as when the writer asserts: "'Vision to the Dark' (ED 7) and 'back in rain' (RF 2) contrast each others meaning of dealing with night and dark." The discussion that does exist provides a balanced, if limited, treatment of each poem.

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**Question 2  
Henry James' "The Pupil"**

**Sample: WWW**

**Score: 8**

The writer of this essay is quite proficient at reading between the lines, giving skillful attention to James' word choice and tone: "Using diction, direct quotes, and an all-knowing narrator to reveal the attitudes of the characters, James creates a tone that becomes increasingly mocking and ironic as the paragraph progresses." Another strength of this essay is the way it consistently interweaves discussion of all three characters. The ungainly last sentence reminds us that lapses are possible, even in the top range: "The characters of 'The Pupil' are ultimately sketches, stereotypes, to be mocked and looked down upon, bringing up the reader's opinion of his or her self."

**Sample: C**

**Score: 6**

A solid character analysis, this essay exemplifies an attainable level of writing paired with a persuasive examination of James' story. Considerable attention is given to the text, with frequent references consistently amplified. Some circuitous thinking and uncontrolled language mar the essay, as when the writer comments: "The thought by Pemberton that his student might be more clever than himself represents the social thinking of the time, that the aristocracy was better than ... the lower society." The writer understands the simple disparity between wealth and poverty, but does not have enough of a grasp on the social implications of such power.

**Sample: T**

**Score: 3**

There are occasional flashes of analysis in this lower-half paper, as when the writer notes that despite the numerous "direct and outward descriptions," most of what readers learn about the characters "is through their actions" and thoughts. As an example of largely reader response with no connections, however, the essay focuses too much on the writer's perceptions of "what the story would be about" or "favorite part of this reading." Infelicitous sentences such as "The tone is a mix between charging and pressing which gives it an amiable feel" indicate the writer's low level of skill. Unsuccessful as an essay, this response chronicles a weaker reader's struggle to decode in language unequal to the task.

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**Question 3**

**Roland Barthes: “Literature is the question minus the answer.”**

**Sample: N**

**Score: 8**

A persuasive analysis of *Candide*, this essay is clear and precise. The writer controls the thesis (Candide's struggle to "comprehend why this world should not be the best of all possible worlds") and understands how to relate incident to theme in a fluid way: "At the start of his journey Candide seemed intent on discovering a Utopia, an entire planet that was already at peace with itself and could not possibly become any better. It took Candide his entire life to discover that this is the best of all possible worlds, but those who inhabit this world must work to maintain it." All that is lacking in this very proficient analysis is more sophistication in language and syntax and a little less repetition; the writer vacillates between archaic usages like "amongst" and colloquialisms such as "kicked out of his castle."

**Sample: J**

**Score: 6**

Although very reliant on plot, this writer does use narrative references to analyze the complexities of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*: "When in town or with other people such as the 'King' and the 'Duke,' Jim and Huck must hide their feelings for each other because of society's conventions about race." The extent to which the writer deals with the question given in the prompt remains thin, despite the promise in the introduction that the essay will deal with "the central question 'What does it mean to be free?'" What follows, however, merely skirts around this important issue. The essay is quite competent, but not sufficiently deep to merit ranking in the highest range.

**Sample: U**

**Score: 3**

The author of this brief essay chooses an excellent example to discuss, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and attempts to treat issues of permanence and transience in the novel. However, the writer never rises to the level of true analysis, but merely dances around the issues that are introduced. Vacuous thinking and unsophisticated language dominate the essay: "But as time gradually passed by, changes began to form. Whether they were small or major changes, they always happen." The essay does show promise, saving it from the lowest scoring range.