



**AP[®] English Language
2004 Sample Student Responses
Form B**

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In every society, there is a set of rules. To belong, ~~is~~ one often has to look, act, or talk a certain way. Otherwise, how will we be able to talk to others, if there is nothing we can agree on, nothing to talk about because everything is unfamiliar to us? Many great works of literature have explored this need to conform to society, to feel that one belongs. However, as works like *Jane Eyre*, *Hamlet*, and *Grendel* show; while unspoken rules may facilitate acceptance into society and ~~make~~^{increase} one's chances of belonging or feeling like they belong, nobody ever completely feels that they fit in.

In *Jane Eyre*, Edward Rochester is a man who, outcasted by his family since his brother is favored over him, is left with a wife (who he was tricked into marrying for her money), no dignity, no social status, and no money. By the time he meets Jane, however; he has achieved all that. It was everything he thought he'd ever wanted: money, status, and beautiful women around him. At one of his parties, Jane observes his practices: he is well-dressed, eating good food, and is ~~being~~ playing his role of a charming host, cracking jokes and singing and playing the piano. However, as he reveals to Jane, Rochester is plagued by the memory of his family, of his crazy wife in the attic, and is not truly happy. He only appears to belong, but does not truly feel as



if he belongs, as he still has many doubts and insecurities.

In *Hamlet*, Hamlet attempts to belong, playing his role of an intelligent prince, a dutiful son, and charming lover. He is supposed to be the ideal - after all, he is a prince. Thus he sets out speaking in iambic meter, he writes love letters to Ophelia, sweet enough to make her swoon; he goes to school so that he can come back and be an educated, learned prince before taking over his father's throne. Circumstances, however, make him turn away from these roles. As his mother's marriage with Claudius infuriates him, he increasingly rebels and pretends to be crazy. By not acting within his societal role; by being rude to Claudius and pushing away, Hamlet drives himself further and further from society and all he has ever known. He is even outcasted by Claudius and eventually killed - all because he couldn't conform to society's rules and continue pretending to be a happy prince/son/lover.

In *Grendel*, Unferth is initially a righteous man, a warrior, the son of an honorable man. His belief in inner heroism and ideals of glory that once made him belong in Hrothgar's halls are shattered by Grendel's apple-throwing and failure to die as a "hero" in pursuit of the big, bad monster that the Shaper has weaved. As a result, Unferth can no longer belong, because



he has lost the image of glory that the Shaper ~~is~~ still ingrains in everybody else's minds. Furthermore, as a "brother-killer", Unferth is scorned and outcasted; thus his failure to adhere to society's ideals lead to his alienation from Society.

As another example, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* shows the way one will not necessarily feel ~~as~~ that they belong, despite following the unspoken rules. In this book, mahjong, food, preparations for big family get-togethers, and gossip all dominate the lives of the first-generation women, as well as their supernatural beliefs. However, for the second generation daughters growing up in America with the traditions of the Chinese belief enabled them to follow the "rules" of both societies as they went to dances and sleepovers, ~~but~~ as well as ^{getting used to their} ~~growing up with~~ fussy mothers talking about ghosts and ancestors, as they and adhered to Chinese customs of ~~sitting~~ greeting their "Aunties". Still, the younger generation never felt they fully belonged in either world, Chinese or American, though they could follow the "unspoken rules" of both.

Literature, thus, shows us that while following unspoken rules facilitates acceptance, it only gives one the appearance of belonging; ~~as~~ as *Hamlet*, *Greendel*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Joy Luck Club* all show, one can never fully feel as if they belong.

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P₁

Unspoken rules help to define group identity by giving us a weird sense of intrinsic understanding. After all, if a mutual belief need not be spoken to be understood by all parties, it is implicit that all the members are in some way, one unit. Separate units need communicate, by writing or speech, but one unit simply knows.

For example, ~~the~~ the usual and most intense feeling of being not belonging is when one has most recently joined a new group, be it a family, or a class, a religious group, etc. The idea being to get along, first and foremost in one's mind is usually not to "piss anyone off." Failure can lead to said wrath, but also simply a sense of not belonging. If the rules and customs that all the other members of the class take for granted must be spelled out for you and you alone, no amount of ~~some~~ introspective reasoning can compensate for the fact that you are missing something. The only student that fails to stand and greet the teacher is a rather visual depression in the high mood of the room, in a Japan or China, but to



Leap up in such a way at a teacher's entrance in the States can look a little "outlandish."

Even small misunderstandings can lead to a sense of segregation. Loudly complaining of physical pain or emotional problems may appear awkward and embarrassing in some families, while hiding such things may seem psychotic, "group"-attendance worthy, or even simply hurtful in others. Of course such things are easily laid to rest or brushed off, passed off as "just another one of those weird cultural/family/religious/etc. phenomena," but there will always come that pause, that glance, that, "Oh, you didn't know?" Feeling stupid is not good for solidarity.

If nothing, ~~to~~ ~~to~~ having outsiders that do not understand unspoken codes can throw one's group solidarity into sharp focus. Though one might feel a cultural gap with certain friends, for instance, one's close mother abruptly offering to pay for a trinket that was "too expensive" for a less bourgeoisie friend might lead to a healthy embarrassment that ~~is~~ puts a connecting string between friends and a wall between daughter and mother.

The outsider ~~is~~ is the one that ~~does~~ doesn't understand.

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~~under~~

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Unspoken rules are inherent in every group and society no more such than in High School. What are the understandings that make a group of more than 800 students all be seen as one large entity? When Professor Michael Ignatieff writes "To belong is to understand the tacit codes of the people you live with" he might ~~mean~~ as well be speaking about conformity not belonging.

By accepting the unspoken rules than you can in actuality belong, but by only understanding them you are only able to conform to a society. High schools have certain universal characteristics, whether rich or poor, Asian, American, or European, teenagers manage to create a mass group identity world wide. At each school there are always rules to be followed, and depending on your friends rules to be broken. Each school has different groups, whether the athletes, the nerds, the dorks, teenagers can criticise and categorize within minutes. Yet despite the many differences there is class unity and spirit; ^{what} ~~what~~ makes two completely opposite personalities work together? The main tacit code in any high school is that it is always students versus teachers. A way to fit in quickly and belong is the second major rule, conformity, from the way you talk, walk, dress and act it must be the same as those around you. This is not to say that everyone dresses the same, although you will find a lot of jeans and brand names, you will ~~also~~ ^{also} find the all black and punk jewelry on the rebels so the



rule is to follow the rules of whatever group you choose (or are forced by lack of options) to belong to.

Different societies have different views about clothing and appropriate behavior and these reflect many of their countries ideals. In India women should be very concealed in their clothing and in order to fit in shorts and short skirts and sleeveless shirts should not be worn. For example if you do not follow this unspoken rule about clothing you not only prevent yourself from being able to belong you also give a completely erroneous impression that your morals are easy. ~~Many people~~

Many people are ^{only} unconsciously aware of the unspoken rules. In high school no one has to say, "if you pick a fight with the most popular girl in school she will cause trouble for you" it is immediately understood. Just as no one likes people who are tattletales or who betray your class to another class.

It is impossible either to conform or to belong if you do not know the ~~the~~ unspoken rules. Society is in fact like a high school, there are multiple layers or levels to get to a state of belonging. The first level is simply being there (i.e. ^{born in} ~~living in~~ America means you are an American², going to HKIS means you are a student of HKIS). The second level is following



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the spoken rules or laws of a place. In high school this means going to class, not drinking or smoking on campus, being respectful to teachers, & turning your work in. In society it is having a job, paying taxes, being part of a community, voting, and numerous other responsibilities of citizens. It is not until the third level where you have the chance to belong and this by understanding and playing by the unspoken rules of the people around you. These rules don't have to ~~define~~ define you, for example just because I am an athlete does not mean I am not also a scholar, but they do influence the decisions you choose to make.

Each person has the choice whether to follow the unspoken rules or not. There are many instances where there are difficult complications that arise when you break an ~~unspoken~~ ^{unspoken} rule, like in India. There is a line that has to be drawn between individuality and conformity, and belonging is somewhere between the two.

By accepting the unspoken rules of the people you live with you could be making a huge sacrifice in which case you should look at why you want to belong to that particular group of people. In other instances it can be



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dangerous to disobey those rules in which case you should try to follow them. In all cases the existence of these rules are ^{an} integral part of belonging to any society around the world.

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