

# AP<sup>®</sup> ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

## 2007 SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 1

(Richard Wilbur and Billy Collins)

The score reflects the quality of the essay as a whole—its content, its style, its mechanics. Students are rewarded for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by 1 point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a 3.

- 9–8** These essays offer a persuasive comparison/contrast of the two poems and present an insightful analysis of the relationship between them. Although these essays offer a range of interpretations and choose to emphasize different poetic devices, these papers provide convincing readings of both poems and demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the analysis of poetry. Their textual references are apt and specific. Though they may not be error-free, these essays are perceptive in their analysis and demonstrate writing that is clear and sophisticated, and in the case of a 9 essay, especially persuasive.
- 7–6** These competent essays offer a reasonable comparison/contrast of the two poems and an effective analysis of the relationship between them. They are less thorough or less precise in their discussion of the themes and devices, and their analysis of the relationship between the two poems is less convincing. These essays demonstrate the ability to express ideas clearly with references to the text, although they do not exhibit the same level of effective writing as the 9–8 papers. While essays scored 7–6 are generally well written, those scored a 7 demonstrate more sophistication in both substance and style.
- 5** These essays may respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of the two poems and their relationship, but they may be superficial in analysis of theme and devices. They often rely on paraphrase, but paraphrase that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Their comparison/contrast of the relationship between the two poems may be vague, formulaic, or minimally supported by references to the texts. There may be minor misinterpretations of one or both poems. These students demonstrate control of language, but the writing may be marred by surface errors. These essays are not as well conceived, organized, or developed as 7–6 essays.
- 4–3** These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the two poems. The analysis may be partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant, or may ignore one of the poems completely. Evidence from the poems may be slight or misconstrued, or the essays may rely on paraphrase only. The writing often demonstrates a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a 3 may contain significant misreadings and/or demonstrate inept writing.
- 2–1** These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4–3 range. Although some attempt has been made to respond to the prompt, assertions are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the poems themselves. The essays may contain serious errors in grammar and mechanics. They may offer a complete misreading or be unacceptably brief. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the poems.
- 0** These essays give a response with no more than a reference to the task.
- These essays are either left blank or are completely off topic.

In "A Barred Owl" and "The History Teacher," two poets describe efforts <sup>by adults</sup> to soothe the curiosity and fear of young children. However, the literary devices used by the two authors reveal two very different intentions and end results. Whereas Wilbur uses a simple rhyme scheme, a humorous tone and juxtaposition of ~~the~~ the rational and the absurd to depict the narrator's attempt to "domesticate" irrational fears, Collins uses trivializing diction and other devices to show that the teacher's attempt to shield his students from relevant facts and real-world issues is both ironic and unfruitful.

The simple and soothing nature of "A Barred Owl" is in part helped by the rhyme scheme of the poem. ~~Structuring~~ Structuring the poem in couplets, Wilbur explains the supposedly frightening situation with relative simplicity, writing "The warping night air having brought the boom / Of an owl's voice into her darkened room." Wilbur furthers this sense of simplicity, using a humorous tone to portray the narrator's explanation to his child. He writes "We tell the wakened child that all she heard / Was an odd question from a forest bird." Telling the child that ~~was a question from a forest bird~~ ~~and that~~ the sound of the owl is realistically just the sound of a forest bird, Wilbur humorously trivializes the child's inquiry as nothing short of absurd. Lastly, Wilbur directly contrasts between the child's fear and reality to show the irrationality of the fear. Wilbur writes, "Send a small child back to sleep at night... Or dreaming of some small thing in a claw / Borne up to some dark branch and eaten raw."



To contrast fantasy with reality, Wilbur juxtaposes the child's calm response to his parents' words with imagery of the child's original fear, glorified in all of its ~~horror~~ horror. Thus, Wilbur portrays the narrator's successful attempt at answering the irrational fear of his child.

~~Collins describes an attempt to~~ <sup>similar</sup> provide explanations for children. However, whereas the narrator in the first poem trivializes an irrational and absurd fear, the history teacher in the second poem trivializes important and relevant issues, thereby forcing his students to become more ignorant. Collins opens the poem with a sarcastic tone, writing "Trying to protect his students' innocence/ He told them the Ice Age was really just/ the Chilly Age, a period of a million years/ when everyone had to wear sweaters." The description of the teacher's efforts as an attempt to "protect his students' innocence" is ironic in that ~~his efforts~~ ~~his students~~ through this attempt, the teacher ultimately misinforms ~~his students~~ and miseducates his students on historical truths. This contrasts with "A Barred Owl," since the curiosity in "A Barred Owl" is only a childish response, whereas the curiosity of the students in "The History Teacher" demand actual explanation from the teacher. Collins further shows that the teacher's approach to educating his students is flawed, writing "The War of the Roses took place in a garden/ and the End of the



dropped one tiny atom in Japan." Whereas Wilbur's description of the narrator's explanation is humorous, in its absurdity, Collins' play on words with ~~the~~ historical battles and atrocities ~~is~~ only trivializes real-world dangers in a despicable manner. Collins goes on to show that this trivialization has no ultimate benefit on the students. Collins writes "The children would leave his classroom for the playground to torment the weak and the smart... while he gathered up his notes and walked home." Contrasting the students' misconduct with the teacher's ignorance, Collins implies a causation between the teacher's inability to truly educate his students and their subsequent misconduct.

~~Collins justifies his statement~~

Whereas Wilbur portrays a good-faith effort made to shield a child from a fear because the fear is inconsequential, Collins juxtaposes a teacher's efforts to shield his students from historical truth and their subsequent behavior to show that the time he spends misinforming his students, could be better used to encourage maturity.

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Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1

1B.

While it is well known that we must fabricate stories and explanations to appease the ignorant minds of <sup>young</sup> children, there must exist a limitation to prevent the extreme form as found in Billy Collins' poem "The History Teacher." It should be noted that these two poems, "A Barred Owl" and "A History Teacher" are from two completely different collections of works, as seen in the notations. ~~With~~ Richard Wilbur's poem is a wonderful recreation of a typical "pre-bedtime" child who finds fear in the dark. ~~With~~ Wilbur uses very powerful diction in his use of <sup>words in</sup> ~~the~~ phrases ~~the~~ "warping night", "darkened room", and "domesticate fear." The child is afraid of the ~~the~~ alien sound she hears coming from a branch outside of her window. Her assumed guardian pacifies her by giving her a explanation personifying the owl. Wilbur writes, "an odd question from a forest bird, asking us... who cooks for you?" ~~With~~ Wilbur explains his own rationale in the following stanza. As it is very true, "words, which can make our terrors bravely clear, can also thus domesticate a fear." Because the truth, as the child's guardian knows, is that a child dreaming of a talking owl, is much ~~more~~ more pleasurable than a child dreaming of "A small thing in a claw... eaten raw."



1

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1B2

The poem "The History Teacher" takes a different approach in order to provide an explanation for children. The poet Billy Collins primary and most central literary device is satire. Unlike the previous poems, the children are redirected towards fantastic fables that completely distort the truth. His explanations, though sometimes very comical, are not the proper way to deal with the ignorance of a child. For instance, "the stone age became the Gravel Age, named after the long driveways of the time," is not a ~~teaching~~ <sup>dilution</sup> of truth, it is a blatant false. Now it can be understood that comedy does wonderful things to a child's mind, but these children are in school to learn. Collins wrote in the first line that the history teacher's goal was to "protect his students' innocence" while he is doing this, he is also misleading the children's factual accuracy of past.

These two poems differ greatly in their literary styles, and the way in which their characters deal with children. The second poem is cute and comical, but it is unrealistic and would challenge kids rather than help them. The first poem is an excellent way to calm a child, and it does not damage the integrity of a young child's mind.

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Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1

1C

In the two poems, *A Barred Owl* and *The History Teacher*, children are given explanations of events that may scare them or events that they have no prior knowledge of. These explanations make use of literary terms such as personification, slight hyperbole, and a little touch of comedy.

In *A Barred Owl*, a small child hears an owl in the night and becomes scared. The explanation of the speaker says that the owl is asking the question, "who cooks for you?" This personification helps the child to conquer his or her fear, and also to put away his or her frightening thoughts.

In *The History Teacher*, the teacher uses a little bit of hyperbole and comedy in order to teach the students. The hyperbole comes into play when the teacher tells the children small lies about what really happened in certain historical events. The comedy comes from the fact that the reader may know one or all of the events that the teacher describes. As a person of more knowledge than the children in the poem, the reader can only laugh when the bombing of Hiroshima is explained as dropping one tiny atom on the city.

In conclusion, the two poems use different literary techniques to explain unknown events to



1

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1C

2

less knowledgeable children. The ~~authors~~ poets give explanations that are quite ludicrous to the educated elite, but give answers that are perfectly fine to the children. This brings together the point that children do not have to know everything; they just have to be care-free children.

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**AP<sup>®</sup> ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION**  
**2007 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 1**

**Overview**

Students were asked to read carefully two poems: Richard Wilbur's "A Barred Owl" and Billy Collins's "The History Teacher," and then to write a well-organized essay in which they compared and contrasted how the two poets employed literary devices to make their points. In this essay, students were expected to analyze how poets use the resources of the English language to achieve their aims. The intent of this question was to assess students' abilities to read closely and to pay attention to details in the texts, noting similarities and differences in the explanations that adults provide to children. To respond to the question successfully, students needed to have a firm grasp of the devices and techniques employed by poets and then to arrive at an analytical and defensible reading of the poems. Because these twentieth-century poems use familiar language, most students were able to respond to them on some level.

**Sample: 1A**

**Score: 8**

This essay contains an insightful analysis of the two poems, aptly analyzing the way each poet contrasts the differing intentions of the speaker in each poem, and the consequences of the lies these children hear. The student provides convincing readings of both poems and discusses how literary devices help each author make his point. For example, Wilbur structures his poem in rhymed couplets to accentuate "the simple and soothing nature" of "A Barred Owl" and juxtaposes the rational and the absurd to explain how the parent tells "the wakened child that all she heard/Was an odd question from a forest bird." The student understands that such a lie is merely "a good-faith effort made to shield a child from a fear because the fear is inconsequential." In contrast, the history teacher in the second poem "trivializes important and relevant issues, thereby forcing his students to become more ignorant." Collins's sarcastic tone is demonstrated in such "flawed" assertions as "the Ice Age was really just/the Chilly Age, a period of a million years/when everyone had to wear sweaters." The student understands how, through such lies, "the teacher ultimately misinforms and miseducates his students on historical truths." Moreover, the student understands that Collins, by "[c]ontrasting the students' misconduct with the teacher's ignorance . . . implies a causation between the teacher's inability to truly educate his students and their subsequent misconduct." Though not error-free, this essay develops an analysis that makes sense of all aspects of both poems, employing writing that is clear and sophisticated.

**Sample: 1B**

**Score: 6**

Although this essay begins with an unnecessary observation that the two poems come from "different collections of works," from then on the student offers a reasonable discussion of each work, stressing that the lie of the first poem is permissible because "a child dreaming of a talking owl is much more pleasurable than a child dreaming of a "small thing in a claw . . . eaten raw." The second poem is correctly seen as a satire insofar as the children are fed "fantastic fables that completely distort the truth." The student recognizes that "comedy does wonderful things to a child's mind, but these children are in school to learn," and the teacher, while believing he is protecting the children's innocence, "is also misleading the children's factual accuracy of [the] past." However, the student does not recognize that the children in Collins's poem have already lost their innocence, as they torment their classmates on the playground; this lack of precision keeps the response in the bottom of the 7–6 scoring range.

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**Question 1 (continued)**

**Sample: 1C**

**Score: 4**

This lower-half essay begins with a weak introduction that has no real thesis, focusing instead on a listing of the literary terms the student intends to discuss. The discussion fails to offer an adequate analysis of the two poems, substituting a brief consideration of literary devices for a sustained analysis of meaning. While the discussion of “A Barred Owl” shows that the student understands that translating the frightening call of the owl into a simple question—“Who cooks for you?”—helps the child conquer her fear, there is no attempt to compare this small lie to the much larger falsehood of the second poem. Moreover, the analysis of the second poem is inadequate and unconvincing, as the student argues that “The History Teacher” is comical: “the reader can only laugh when the bombing of Hiroshima is explained as dropping one tiny atom on the city.” The student concludes this brief and superficial discussion by suggesting that the explanations given to these children are “fine,” since “children do not have to know everything; they just have to be care-free [*sic*] children.”