

AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
2009 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3
(A Symbol)

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 well-focused and persuasive analysis of how a symbol functions to reveal characters or themes in a novel or play. Using apt and specific textual support, the essays fully explore the symbol and its significance. Although not without flaws, these essays make a strong case for their interpretation and discuss the literary work with insight and understanding. Generally, essays scored a 9 reveal more sophisticated analysis and more effective control of language than do essays scored an 8.
- 7–6** These essays offer a reasonable analysis of how a symbol functions to reveal characters or themes in a novel or play. The essays explore the symbol and demonstrate its significance. While the responses show insight and understanding, their analysis is less thorough, less perceptive, and/or less specific in supporting detail than that of the essays in the 9–8 range. Generally, essays scored a 7 present better-developed analysis and more consistent command of the elements of effective composition than do essays scored a 6.
- 5** These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading, but they tend to be superficial or underdeveloped in analysis. They often rely upon plot summary that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Although students attempt to discuss the symbol’s significance and how it functions to reveal characters or themes, they may demonstrate a rather simplistic understanding of the work. Typically, these essays reveal unsophisticated thinking and development. They demonstrate adequate control of language but may lack effective organization and be marred by surface errors.
- 4–3** These lower-half essays offer a less than thorough understanding of the task or a less than adequate treatment of it. They reflect an incomplete or oversimplified understanding of the work, or they may fail to establish the relationship between the symbol and the work’s characters or themes. The essays may not address or develop the symbol’s significance, or they may rely on plot summary alone. Their assertions may be unsupported or even irrelevant. Sometimes wordy or repetitious, these essays may lack control over the elements of college-level composition. Essays scored a 3 may reflect serious misreading and demonstrate incompetent writing.
- 2–1** Although these essays make some attempt to respond to the prompt, they compound the weaknesses of essays in the 4–3 range. Often, they are unacceptably brief or are incoherent in presenting their ideas. They may be poorly written on several counts and contain distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. Remarks are presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence. Particularly incompetent and/or incoherent essays are scored a 1.
- 0** These essays do no more than make a reference to the task.
- These essays are either left blank or are completely off topic.

The use of a symbol has the potential to deliver a potent message. Used in a work of literature, it has the ability to profoundly affect and ~~also~~ alter the mindset of the audience. In his play, The Wild Duck, Henrik Ibsen uses an overarching symbol of a ~~the~~ wild duck in order to ~~to~~ highlight the events and development of characters throughout, leaving his audience with an interesting sentiment.

Over the course of the play, the Hjalmar family (consisting of Hjalmar, his father, his wife Gina, and his daughter Hedvig) is plagued by Greggers, who wishes to expose their happy family as a horrible act set up by his own father to serve his own ends. The Hjalmar family keep a wild duck, along with some rabbits, in the attic above their apartment in a simulated forest. This duck, along with the story of its capture by Greggers' father, comes to symbolize the family's tranquility and happiness. But Greggers, a high-minded intellectual only concerned with "the demands of the ideal," refuses to let this state of blissful ignorance persevere.

Greggers himself actually casts the symbol. Upon hearing how the duck tried to evade capture by hiding underwater in the reeds, but failed when his father's



dog jumped in after it, wrestling it to the surface, Greggers immediately likens himself to the dog, much to the confusion of the Hjalmar. He does this because he sees himself as one who will provide the truth of his own father's nefarious machinations, dragging the Hjalmar family up to the light, pulling their head out of the weeds. However, in his rabid quest for the truth he inadvertently shatters the Hjalmar family, as his dogged idealism blinds him to the detrimental effect of his influence. Just as the dog injures and imprisons the duck, so does Greggers harm the Hjalmar family.

Both Hjalmar's father and his daughter have special relationships with the duck. Hjalmar's father uses it and its false forest in the attic to escape to better times, before Greggers's father ruined him, leaving him nothing. This again reveals the duck's use symbolizing happiness, as his interactions with it leave him contented in a fantasy world, rather than facing and being destroyed by his own bleak existence. Hedvig considers the duck to be hers, and plays with it often, taking great pride in the fact that she has a wild duck. This, too, runs a double meaning once Greggers reveals the secrets.

Eventually Greggers casts aside all the illusions



of the Hjalmar's fantasy world, revealing that Gina was once his father's lover, that his father paid for Hjalmar's education out of guilt for what he had done to ~~his~~^{Hjalmar's} father, and that Hedvig was ~~the~~ the illegitimate child of ~~her~~ her father. This leads to the dissolution of the Hjalmar family, as Hjalmar leaves, outraged. Greggers convinces Hedvig that the only way to get her father back is to shoot the wild duck. She takes a gun and goes to kill the duck, but commits suicide instead. Greggers is left shocked that Hjalmar didn't like the truth and appalled that Hedvig shot herself, extremely confused and distraught at the results of his actions. Again, the symbol of the wild duck is used to represent the family's ^{and happiness} innocence, as Hedvig was unwilling to part with it, even at the cost of her own life, and Hjalmar eventually gets rid of it.

It is obvious that this duck as a symbol guides the entire play, revealing several character's deepest motivations, and quite literally representing the theme of blissful ignorance. The play, thanks to the use of this symbol, leaves the audience considering where exactly the line is between happiness, the truth, and simple faith in and love for other people. Without this wild duck, this play would hit nowhere near as hard, perhaps contributing to the decision to name the play after it.

~~answer~~ #

Question 3

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

3B
10/3

Tennessee Williams play "A Streetcar Named Desire" uses a lampshade to symbolize covering up the truth, and this symbol exposes Blanche DuBois' obsession with youth, and her ~~need~~ ^{need} to make everything in life appear better than it is. This ^{realization of Blanche's character} ~~realization of the~~ uncovers the truth behind her past and the ~~trauma~~ traumatic experience that haunts her.

Blanche's obsession with putting a lampshade on lightbulb is on the surface just a vain ~~attempt~~ ^{attempt} to hide her aging. She claims that a naked light bulb exposes the ^{start} truth. ~~Blanche is constantly looking to the past~~ ~~Blanche is constantly looking to the past~~ ~~Blanche is constantly looking to the past~~ She is uncomfortable discussing age to her courtier Mitch, who innocently asks because his mother wants to know. Her ~~desire~~ ~~desire~~ desire to appear young at first seems to be just a woman who wants to appear prettier than she is.

Blanche's ~~need~~ need to cover things up begins to extend further than just apoca-



rance and age. She keeps her part from her loving sister, she hides the truth of why she was fired from her job, and she attempts to ~~keep~~ ^{hide} ~~hide~~ the fact that she is flat broke. The reader becomes accustomed to not trusting anything Blanche says, because it ends up being far from the truth. The lampshade symbolizes ~~her~~ ^{her} fantastical and ~~unreal~~ ^{unreal} view of things.

This strong desire to cover up the truth ~~is a coping mechanism that stems~~ far back to when Blanche was first married ^{to Alan}. She reveals this story to Mitch while they are on a date. ~~She~~ She explains how she never seemed to satisfy him, and she discovered he was gay. When she told Alan ~~she knew~~ ^{she knew} that she knows and is disgusted, Alan ^{runs outside and} shoots himself. ~~She~~ She obsesses with lampshades because the one time she exposed the truth, her first love was lost. Making everything ~~is~~ ^{is} fairy-tale-like and better than it is is her ~~a~~ coping with the fact that because



Question 3

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

3B
3073

she exposed the truth of her husband she lost him. ~~she~~ she never dealt with the trauma of losing someone she loved, instead she began the pattern of hiding what's real for the rest of her life until the play ends with her being taken to the huthouse.
~~for covering the up~~

The symbol of the lampshade is ~~Blanche's~~ Blanche's character trait of always ^{covering} ~~covering~~ the flaws in life. While this seems to be superficial at first, it actually ~~exposes~~ exposes the sad truth that Blanche never dealt with losing her love due to ~~not~~ telling his secret. She covers every naked lightbulb ~~to~~ to make up for ^{unveiling} ~~exposing~~ and in effect killing, Alan.

#

Things Fall Apart was a novel based on pride and strength and power. There are many aspects in the novel that symbolize power and strength. The main symbol of the book, in my opinion, is the machete that Okonkwo carried with him. It symbolizes a higher level in power and the man who carried it was an intimidating man.

Okonkwo used his machete on many occasions. He used it to fight the white men who were building churches and taking land in his town in Africa. They were converting his family and friends to Christianity. His machete was his defense mechanism to scare them off ~~but~~ although in the end the christian white folk won the battle.

Okonkwo never let a woman touch his machete because then that would defeat its purpose of being symbolic. Had a woman got a hold of his machete she would have had power and strength and would look intimidating. Women in Africa are (based by the book) nurturing and caring and tend to their children and family. They do not carry machetes.

The machete is used for defense purposes. Why would a man with no enemies, no war, no fight in him, in a peaceful world, carry a machete? He wouldn't. Okonkwo had enemies, he had war, he had LOTS of fight in him, he wasn't living in a peaceful world. Okonkwo needed that machete. He needed it to survive. He needed it



Question 3

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

3C
2 of 2

to fight off dangers.

This machete gave him power, strength, intimidation, and a sense of defense. He could care for himself. Without it, Okonkwo would not be who he was. There was ~~was~~ ^{also} pride with that machete. Okonkwo did not have the machete w/ him when he hung himself. There is no pride in taking one's own life. And with that, there is no machete. So it symbolizes pride. Most of all.

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AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

2009 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 3

Overview

The prompt for question 3, the “open” question, began by defining a symbol as “an object, action, or event that represents something or that creates a range of associations beyond itself.” The prompt added that symbols can “express an idea, clarify meaning, or enlarge literal meaning.” Students were then asked to select a novel or play, to focus on one symbol, and to write an essay analyzing how the symbol functions in the work; students were asked to analyze what the symbol reveals about characters or themes in the work as a whole.

The aim of this prompt was to assess students’ abilities to analyze the connection between one specific symbol and larger issues—idea, meaning, character, or theme—resonating through a text. To respond to the question successfully, students needed to write an effective and well-organized essay that moved beyond description or summary of events to articulate an argument about the text’s larger meanings as expressed through character or theme. They needed to show how the literary element of the symbol functions through its reappearances in the text to create, amplify, or reveal meanings.

Sample: 3A

Score: 9

Although this essay on *The Wild Duck* begins with a rather vague, weak thesis (“Henrik Ibsen uses an overarching symbol of a wild duck in order to highlight the events and development of characters throughout, leaving his audience with an interesting sentiment”), it soon becomes precise and controlled. For example, the extended analogy of how Greggers likens himself to the dog that pulled the duck out from the reeds is exceptionally insightful: “he sees himself as one who will provide the truth of his own father’s nefarious machinations, dragging the Hjalmar family up to the light, pulling their head out of the reeds. However, in his rabid quest for the truth he inadvertently shatters the Hjalmar family, as his dogged idealism blinds him to the detrimental effect of his influence. Just as the dog injures and imprisons the duck, so does Greggers harm the Hjalmar family.” This detailed analysis is thoughtful, well organized, and sophisticated. The final paragraph is a bit weaker than the rest, but the essay provides a wealth of insightful detail about the play. Plot detail is employed only in the service of analysis and never as an end in itself.

Sample: 3B

Score: 6

This essay about *A Streetcar Named Desire* improves as the student writes more, and it convincingly demonstrates an understanding of the function of the lampshade in the play. The student provides a reasonable argument for the meaning of the lampshade, showing how “Blanche’s [*sic*] obsession with putting a lampshade on light bulbs” is more than “just a vain attempt to hide her aging.” Rather, it “symbolizes her fantastical and unreal view of things.” Because Blanche hides her past and her poverty, “[t]he reader becomes accustomed to not trusting anything Blanche says, because it ends up being far from the truth.” By demonstrating insight into Blanche’s character, the essay manages to express ideas clearly with references to the text.

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Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3C

Score: 4

This discussion of *Things Fall Apart* provides a sustained focus on the machete but contains only an adequate analysis of the novel. The essay contains a number of assertions, such as “Okonkwo had enemies, he had war, he had lots of fight in him, he wasn’t living in a peaceful world,” but none of these claims is developed or supported with evidence from the text. The essay is more coherent and developed than the weakest responses, but it contains little about how the machete as a symbol contributes to the book’s meaning. The final paragraph, which asserts that “Okonko [sic] did not have the machete w/ him when he hung himself” and so had “no pride,” is rather problematic and provides no real conclusion to the essay.